13 Sermons

by

John Newton

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THIRTEEN SERMONS

ON MATTHEW XI. 25—30.

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

BY THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

A. D. 1767.

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TO

THE INHABITANTS

OF

THE PARISH OF OLNEY.

My dear Friends,

I have principally two motives for publishing these discourses. The one is, to exhibit a specimen of the doctrine that is taught and most surely believed amongst us, to satisfy those who desire information, and to stop, if possible, the mouth of slander. I cheerfully submit them to examination, in full confidence that they contain nothing of moment which is not agreeable to the general strain of the word of God, and to the principles of the church whereof I am a minister, as specified in the Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies. And that what I now print is to the same purport with the usual course of my preaching, I doubt not but all who statedly hear me, will do me the justice to acknowledge.

My other motive is, a desire of promoting your edification. It is my comfort that many of you live by the truths of the gospel, and highly prize them. You will not, therefore, be unwilling to view the substance of what you once heard with acceptance. But it is to be feared, that the far greater part of the congregation have need to have the things pertaining to their peace pressed upon them again and again, for a different reason; not because they know them, and therefore love to have them brought to their remembrance, but because they have hitherto heard them without effect. For the sake of both, therefore, I am willing to leave an abiding testimony amongst you. I hereby take each of your consciences to wit-

ness, that I am clear of your blood; and that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.

As long discourses are in many respects inconvenient, I have chosen to publish no more than a brief summary of what you heard more at large from the pulpit. And as I aim to speak plain truths to a plain people, I have purposely avoided any studied ornaments in point of expression, being desirous to accommodate myself to the apprehensions of the most ignorant.

May it please the God of all grace to accompany my feeble endeavours to promote the knowledge of his truth with the powerful influence of his Holy Spirit? And I earnestly entreat all who know how to draw near to a throne of grace by Jesus Christ, to strive mightily in prayer for me, that I may stand fast in the faith, and increase in the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour; and that, for his sake, I may labour, without fear of fainting, in the service to which he has been pleased to call me. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

I am your affectionate friend, and servant in the gospel of Christ,

JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, Jan. 20, 1767.

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE SMALL SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY CONSIDERED.

MATTHEW xi. 25.

AT THAT TIME JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID, I THANK THEE, O FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, BECAUSE THOU HAST HID THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE AND PRUDENT, AND HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES.

Our blessed Lord perfectly knew beforehand the persons who would profit by his ministry: but his observations, conduct, and discourses, were intended as a pattern and instruction to his followers. He is said to have marvelled at the unbelief of some, and at the faith of others; not as though either was strange to him, who was acquainted with all hearts, and always knew what he himself could do; but it is spoken of him as a man, and to show how his ministers and people should be affected upon the like occasions. In the preceding verses he had been speaking of Capernaum, and other places, where his mighty works had been performed in vain He had denounced a sentence against them; and foretold that their punishment would be heavier in proportion to the greatness of the privileges they had abused. But this was not his pleasing work.

Mercy and grace were his delight, and he usually expressed sorrow and pain for the obstinacy of sinners. He wept for his avowed enemies, and prayed for the murderers who nailed him to the cross. It was not without grief that he declared the approaching doom of these cities; yet, raising his thoughts from earth to heaven, he acquiesced in the will of his heavenly Father, and expressed the highest satisfaction in his appointment. He knew, that, however some would harden themselves, there was a remnant who would receive the truth, and that the riches and glory of the Divine sovereignty and grace would be magnified. Before I enter upon the particulars, this connexion of the words will afford us ground for some observations.

I. That the small success and efficacy of the preached gospel upon multitudes who hear it, is a subject of wonder and grief to the ministers and people of God. It was so to our Lord Jesus, considered as a Preacher and Messenger; and they, so far as they have received his Spirit, judge and act as he did.

1. Those who have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, have had such a powerful experience in their own souls of the necessity and value of the gospel, that in their first warmth, and till painful experience has convinced them of the contrary, they can hardly think it possible that sinners should stand out against its evidence. They are ready to say, "Surely it is because they are ignorant; they have not had opportunity of considering the evil of sin, the curse of the law, and the immense goodness of God manifested in his Son; but when these things shall be plainly and faithfully set before them, surely they will submit, and thankfully receive the

glad tidings." With such sanguine hopes Melancthon entered the ministry at the dawn of the Reformation: he thought he had only to speak and to be heard, in order to convince; but he soon found himself mistaken, and that the love of sin, the power of prejudice, and the devices of Satan, were such obstacles in his way, as nothing less than the mighty operations of the Spirit of God could break through. And all who preach upon his principles, and with his views, have known something of his disappointment. Speaking from the feelings of a full heart, they are ready to expect that others should be no less affected than themselves. But when they find that they are heard with indifference, perhaps with contempt; that those whose salvation they long for, are enraged against them for their labour of love; that they cannot prevail upon their dearest friends, and nearest relatives—this grieves and wounds them to the heart.

2. They have been convinced themselves, that unbelief was the worst of all their sins: and therefore, though they pity all who live in the practice of sin, yet they have a double grief to see them reject the only means of salvation; and that this contempt will lie more heavily upon them, than any thing they can be charged with besides. It gladdens the heart of a minister to see a large and attentive assembly; but how is this joy damped by a just fear, lest any, lest many of them should receive this grace of God in vain, and have cause at last to bewail the day when the name of Jesus was first sounded in their ears!

It seems plain, then, that those who are indifferent about the event of the gospel, who satisfy themselves with this thought, that the elect shall be

saved, and feel no concern for unawakened sinners, make a wrong inference from a true doctrine, and know not what spirit they are of. Jesus wept for those who perished in their sins. St. Paul had great grief and sorrow of heart for the Jews, though he gives them this character, "They please not God, and they are contrary to all men." It well becomes us, while we admire distinguishing grace to ourselves, to mourn over others: and as secret things belong to the Lord, and we know not but some of whom we have at present but little hopes may at last be brought to the knowledge of the truth, we should be patient and forbearing, after the pattern of our heavenly Father, and endeavour by every probable and prudent means, to stir them up to repentance, remembering that they cannot be more distant from God, than by nature we were ourselves.

II. The best relief against those discouragements we meet with from men, is to raise our thoughts to God and heaven. For this the Lord Jesus is our precedent here. He said, "I thank thee, O Father." The word* signifies, to confess, to promise, or consent, and to praise. As if it had been said, "I glorify thy wisdom in this respect, I acknowledge and declare that it is thy will, and I express my own consent and approbation." Our Lord's views of the Divine counsels were perfect, and therefore his satisfaction was complete. It is said, "He rejoiced in spirit," Luke x. 21. when he uttered these words. And the more we increase in faith and in the knowledge of God, the more we shall be satisfied in his appointments, and shall see and say, "He hath done all things well." It is needful for

* The original word occurs Matt. iii. 6. Luke xxii. 6. and Rom. xv. 9.

our comfort to be well established in the truth suggested in my text—That the Lord hath provided for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and that his counsels shall surely stand. From this doctrine we may infer,—

1. That where the faithful labours and endeavours of ministers and others, to promote the knowledge of grace and the practice of holiness, fail of success, yet they shall be accepted. The servants of Christ may in their humble measure adopt the words of their Lord and Master, in the prophet: "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength," Isa. xlix. 5. When he sent forth his first disciples, he directed them wherever they entered to say, "Peace be to this house! and if a son of peace be there," if there be any who thankfully accept your salutation and message, "your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall return to you again," Luke x. 5, 6. That is, your good wishes and endeavours shall not be lost for want of proper objects; but when they seem without effect on others, shall be productive of the happiest consequences to yourselves. You shall receive all you were desirous to communicate. Thus his ministers are to declare his whole will, whether men will hear, or whether they shall forbear. And if they do this with a single eye to his glory, and in humble dependence upon his blessing, they are not answerable for the event, they shall in no wise lose their reward.

2. Faithful endeavours in the service of the gospel shall not wholly fail. Though all will not hear, some certainly will both hear and obey. Though all are by nature equally averse and incapa-

ble, yet there shall be "a willing people in the day of God's power," Psalm cx. 3. If the wise and prudent turn away from the truth, there are babes to whom it shall be revealed. The Lord renews unto us a pledge of his faithfulness in this concern every time the rain descends. For thus he has promised, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it," Isa. lv. 10.

3. The Divine sovereignty is the best thought we can retreat to for composing and strengthening our minds under the difficulties, discouragements, and disappointments, which attend the publication of the gospel. The more we give way to reasonings and curious inquiries, the more we shall be perplexed and baffled. When Jeremiah, Jer. xviii. 6. had been complaining of some things that were too hard for him, the Lord sent him to the potter's house, and taught him to infer, from the potter's power over the clay, the just right which the Lord of all hath to do what he will with his own. It is only the pride of our own hearts that prevents this consideration from being perfectly conclusive and satisfactory. How many schemes derogatory from the free grace of God, tending to darken the glory of the gospel, and to depreciate the righteousness of the Redeemer, have taken their rise from vain unnecessary attempts to vindicate the ways of God; or rather to limit the actings of infinite Wisdom to

the bounds of our narrow understandings, to sound the depths of the Divine counsels with our feeble plummets, and to say to Omnipotence, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." But upon the ground of the Divine sovereignty, we may rest satisfied and stable: for if God appoints and over-rules all, according to the purpose of his own will, we have sufficient security, both for the present and the future.

(1.) For the present, we may firmly expect, what scripture and reason concur to assure us, that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." Whatever to us appears otherwise in his proceedings, should be charged to the darkness and weakness of our minds. We know, that in every point of science difficulties and objections occur to young beginners, which at first view may seem almost unanswerable; but as knowledge increases, the difficulties gradually subside, and at last we perceive they were chiefly owing to the defects of our apprehension. In divinity it is wholly so; "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all:" his revealed will is, like himself, just, holy, pure in the whole, and perfectly consistent in every part. We may safely rest upon this general maxim, that "the Judge of all the earth shall do right." Though he does not give us a particular account of his dealings, and we are not fully able to comprehend them; yet we ought, against all appearances and proud reasonings, to settle it firmly in our minds, that every thing is conducted worthy the views which God has given us of himself in his holy word, as a being of infinite justice, wisdom, goodness, and truth. And farther,

(2.) For the future. He has appointed a day when he will make it appear that he has done right.

Though clouds and darkness are now upon his proceedings, they shall ere long be removed. When all his designs in providence and grace are completed; when the present imperfect state of things shall be finished; when the dead, small and great, are summoned to stand before him; then the great Judge will condescend to unfold the whole train of his dispensations, and will justify his proceedings before angels and men. Then every presumptuous cavil will be silenced, every difficulty solved. His people will admire his wisdom, his enemies will confess his justice. The destruction of those who perish shall be acknowledged as deserved, and of themselves; and the redeemed of the Lord shall ascribe all the glory of their salvation to him alone. What we shall then see, it is now our duty and our com assuredly to believe.

The great subject of our Saviour's joy, and which, so far as it is apprehended, will bear up his servants above all their difficulties and disappointments, I mean, the consideration of the sovereign hand of God directing the success of his word when and where he pleases, we must defer speaking of till the next opportunity. And we shall close at present with a few inferences from what has been said thus far, by way of introduction.

[1.] Take heed how you hear. The gospel of salvation, which is sent to you, will be either a "savour of life unto life, or of death unto death," to every soul of you. There is no medium. Though, in a common and familiar way of speaking, we sometimes complain that the gospel is preached without effect, there is in reality no possibility that it can be without effect. An effect it must and will have upon all who hear it. Happy they who receive

and embrace it as a joyful sound, the unspeakable gift of God's love. To these it will be a "savour of life unto life." It will communicate life to the soul at first, and maintain that life, in defiance of all opposition, till it terminates in glory. But woe, woe to those who receive it not. It will be to them "a savour of death unto death." It will leave them under the sentence of death, already denounced against them by the law which they have transgressed; and it will consign them to eternal death, under the heaviest aggravations of guilt and misery. Remember the doom of Capernaum, and why it was denounced. Jesus preached amongst them the words of eternal life, and they rejected him. This was all. In other things, perhaps, they were no worse than their neighbours, and probably disdained to hear themselves judged worthy of a heavier punishment than Sodom, and those cities which for their abominations were consumed with fire from heaven. But our Lord assures us, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for those who slight his word. For this guilt and condemnation is not confined to the Jews who rejected his person, but extended to all who should at any time treat his gospel with contempt. However inconsiderable his ministers are in other respects, if they faithfully deliver his message, he has declared himself closely interested in the reception they meet with: "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth both me and him that sent me," Matt. x. 40. Luke x. 16. It is, therefore, at your peril to treat what we say with indifference, (if we speak agreeably to the scripture;) the word of God which we preach will judge you at the last day.

[2.] Be afraid of being wise in your own eyes, lest you should approach to the character of those from whom the righteous God sees fit to hide the knowledge of those truths, without which they cannot be saved. The gospel is not proposed to you to ask your opinion of it, that it may stand or fall according to your decision; but it peremptorily demands your submission. If you think yourselves qualified to judge and examine it by that imperfect and depraved light which you call your reason, you will probably find reasons enough to refuse your assent. Reason is properly exercised in the ordinary concerns of life, and has so far a place in religious inquiries, that none can or do believe the gospel, without having sufficient reasons for it. But you need a higher light, the light of God's Spirit, without which the most glorious displays of his wisdom will appear foolishness to you. If you come simple, dependent, and teachable; if you pray from your heart with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things in thy law," Psalm cxix. 18. you will be heard and answered; you will grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: but if you neglect this, and trust in yourselves, as supposing this promised assistance of the Holy Spirit unnecessary, the glorious light of the gospel will shine upon you in vain; for Satan will maintain such hold of you by this pride of your hearts, as still to keep you in bondage and darkness, that you shall neither see it, nor desire to see it.

[3.] Those of you who have some spiritual apprehensions of these things, have reason to praise God, that you see a little. You were once quite blind; you neither saw your disease, nor your remedy. You could discern nothing of the excellence of

Christ, or the beauties of holiness. But now the eyes of your understanding are in some measure enlightened. It is the grace of God has made you thus far to differ from what you once were, and from what multitudes around you still are. Be thankful. Accept it as a token for good. Be not discouraged that the beginnings are small; but wait on the Lord, and they shall be increased. Seek him by prayer. Converse with your bibles. Attend upon the public ordinances. In the humble use of these means, (while you endeavour to act faithfully according to the light you have already received,) you will gradually advance in wisdom and comfort. The christian growth is not instantaneous, but by degrees, as the early dawn increases in brightness till the perfect day, Prov. iv. 18. and as the corn comes forward surely, though unperceived, Mark iv. 26—28. In this manner your views of gospel truth will increase in clearness, evidence, and influence, till you are removed from this land of shadows to the regions of perfect light, to behold the truth as it shines in the person of Jesus, without a vail, and without a cloud, for ever.

SERMON II.

IN WHAT SENSE THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL ARE HID FROM MANY.

MATTHEW xi. 25.

AT THAT TIME JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID, I THANK THEE, O FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, BECAUSE THOU HAST HID THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE AND PRUDENT, AND HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES.

When our Lord appeared upon earth, though he came on the most gracious and important business, displayed the perfection of holiness in his conduct, and performed innumerable acts of kindness and love, he met with little regard. He found many enemies, but few hearty friends. Especially those who were most eminent for riches, learning, power, or reputed goodness, disdained him; and most of those who followed him were either people in low circumstances, or whose character had been offensive. Publicans and sinners, fishermen, unlearned and obscure persons, were almost the only friends he had. The Lord Jesus, who was infinitely above the selfish views which are too apt to influence our little minds, was well satisfied with this event. He did not desire honour from men. "The souls of the poor were precious in his sight," Psa. lxxii. 13, 14. He spoke kindly to those whom men abhorred; and if he mourned over the obstinacy of the chiefs of the people, it was for their own sakes. Yet when he considered the appointment and will of God in this dispensation, he was not only content, but he rejoiced. He expressed his approbation in these

words: "I thank thee, O Father," &c. There is something observable in this passage which will be of continual use and application, so long as the gospel shall be preached. For as it was then, so it is still; the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes. Five particulars offer from the words for our consideration.

I. What may be intended by these things?

II. Where and in what sense they are hid?

III. From whom? "The wise and prudent."

IV. How the knowledge of them is to be obtained? By revelation: "Thou hast revealed."

V. Who are thus favoured? "Babes."

I. By the things which it pleases God should be hid from the wise, and revealed to babes, we may understand,—

1. In general, the things pertaining to salvation. That most men are ignorant of them, and careless about them, is too plain. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the tree is known by its fruits. Men speak as though their tongues were their own; they act as though they were to give no account; they live as though they were to live here for ever. The way of truth is hid from their eyes, and the fear of God has no place in their hearts.

2. More particularly, those doctrines which are in an especial sense peculiar to the gospel, seem here to be intended. If the principles of what some call natural religion, though agreeable to the light of natural conscience, are little regarded; the more spiritual truths of the bible are not only neglected, but scorned and opposed. The same spirit which showed itself under our Lord's personal ministry still subsists. The chief doctrines he taught, and for which he met with the fiercest

opposition, were precisely the same with those which have awakened the scorn and rage of the world ever since; and which multitudes who bear the name of christians in this day oppose with all their strength. Such as,

(1.) The Divinity of Christ. When he spoke of himself as existing before Abraham, and said that God was his own Father, the Jews took up stones to stone him, John v. 18. And this mystery is still hid from the natural man. No one can say, acknowledge, and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord our Jehovah; that he, who once hung upon the cross, bleeding to death, is God the Maker of all things, the rightful object of the supreme love, trust, and homage of men and angels, but by the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. xii. 3.

(2.) Distinguishing grace. When Jesus first preached at Nazareth, the eyes of all were fixed upon him, Luke iv. 16. 20. but when, making application to themselves, he touched upon this point, from the examples of Naaman the Syrian, and the widow of Sarepta, who were released when many lepers and widows in Israel were passed by; they were filled with indignation, and would have thrown him headlong down the rock. And it is to this hour an offensive doctrine to all who do not know the value and the need of it.

(3.) The new birth. When this was proposed to a master in Israel, he cried out, "How can these things be," John iii. 9. And by many who are wise and prudent in their own sight, it is at this day accounted nonsense. A small acquaintance with the general strain of what is published either from the pulpit or the press, may prove that modern divinity has for the most part found a smoother

path to tread than that by which Nicodemus was conducted to the knowledge of himself and his Saviour. Such a doubtful inquirer might now be entertained with many ingenious essays on the beauty of virtue, the efficacy of benevolence, the excellency of the human mind, and other favourite topics. He would find teachers enough to encourage and improve the idea he has of his own importance, but he would hardly meet with many who would speak to him in our Lord's language, and refer him to the brazen serpent, and a new birth, in order to learn the means and the nature of the gospel salvation.

(4.) The nature of the life of faith. When our Lord spoke of this, under the metaphor of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, many who till then had professed themselves his disciples, "turned back, and walked no more with him," John vi. 66. And none can bear it now who are not taught of God, to see such an excellency and sufficiency in Jesus, and such emptiness in themselves, as constrains them to cry out with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" John vi. 68. These things are hid from the wise and prudent. But,

II. Where, and in what sense, are these things hid?

1. Where are they hid?

(1.) They are hid in Christ. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii. 3. He is the great repository of truth. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," Col. i. 19. And he is the Messenger by whom the will of God is made known to man, Luke ix. 35. John i. 18. From hence observe, 1. You can attain to no saving truth, but in and by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If they are hid in him, it can be but lost labour to seek them elsewhere.

2. Whatever seeming knowledge you have, if it does not endear him to you, it is nothing worth. It is science falsely so called, and can do you no good: for in the knowledge of him, and of him alone, is eternal life, John xvii. 3.

(2.) They are hid in the word of God. 1. They are contained there: "The whole scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is able to make us wise unto salvation," 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16. to furnish us with a sufficiency of knowledge and motives for every good work. The word of God is perfect. 2. Yet though contained there, they are not plain to every eye. Though they are revealed in the letter, they are still hid from the wise and prudent. Something more is necessary than barely to read in order to understand them; otherwise all who can read, and have the bible, would be equally enlightened with equal application. But experience shows it far otherwise. This leads me farther to inquire,

2. In what sense they are hid?

(1.) They are not hid as if it were on purpose that those who sincerely seek them should be disappointed in their search. Far be it from us to think so hardly of the Lord. We have express promises to the contrary, that all who earnestly seek shall find. Fear not, you that sincerely desire an experimental and practical knowledge of the truths of God, and are willing to be taught in his appointed way: though many things appear difficult to you at present, the Lord will gradually increase your light, and crown your endeavours with success.

(2.) But from some persons they are hid, even from the wise and prudent, whom we are to speak of hereafter. Suffer me to offer a familiar illustration of the Lord's wisdom and justice in this pro-

cedure. Let me suppose a person to have a curious cabinet, which is opened at his pleasure, and not exposed to common view: he invites all to come to see it, and offers to show it to any one who asks him. It is hid, because he keeps the key: but none can complain, because he is ready to open it whenever he is desired. Some perhaps disdain the offer, and say, Why is it locked at all? Some think it not worth seeing, or amuse themselves with guessing at the contents. But those who are simply desirous for themselves, leave others disputing, go according to appointment, and are gratified. These have reason to be thankful for the favour; and the others have no just cause to find fault. Thus the riches of Divine grace may be compared to a richly-furnished cabinet, to which Christ is the door. The word of God likewise is a cabinet generally locked up; but the key of prayer will open it. The Lord invites all: but he keeps the dispensation in his own hand. They cannot see these things, except he shows them; but then he refuses none that sincerely ask him. The wise men of the world can go no farther than the outside of this cabinet; they may amuse themselves and surprise others with their ingenious guesses at what is within: but a babe who has seen it opened, can give us more satisfaction without studying or guessing at all. If men will presume to aim at the knowledge of God, without the knowledge of Christ, who is the way and the door; if they have such a high opinion of their own wisdom and penetration, as to suppose they can understand the scriptures without the assistance of his Spirit; or if their worldly wisdom teaches them that these things are not worth their inquiry;—what wonder is it that they should continue to be hid

from their eyes? They will one day be stript of all their false pleas, and condemned out of their own mouths.

(3.) The expression, "Thou hast hid," may perhaps farther imply, that those who seek occasion to cavil will meet with something to confirm their prejudices. When people examine the doctrines or profession of the gospel, not with a candid desire to learn, imitate, and practise, but in order to find some plausible ground for misrepresentation, they frequently have their wish. The wisdom of God has appointed difficulties, offences, objections, and stumbling-blocks, to exercise and manifest the spirits of these wise ones. How largely do they expatiate on the divisions and difference of sentiments which too much prevail among those who are united in the same leading truths. If they can discover an instance of error, folly, or wickedness, of a single person who professes to adhere to the gospel doctrine, how do they rejoice as if they had found great spoil! They charge the faults of a few indiscriminately upon the whole, and labour to show, that every mistake and inadvertence is a necessary consequence of the principles which those maintain who commit it. We do not plead for mistakes and errors of any sort, for weakness in judgment, or inconsistency in practice: but as these things are more or less inseparable from the present state of human nature, they necessarily increase and strengthen the prejudices of scorners against the truth, and are so far a means of hiding it from their eyes. Yet here again the fault is wholly in themselves; for they seek and desire such occasions of stumbling, and would be disappointed and grieved if they could not meet with them. But those who are babes in their

own eyes, humble, sincere, and teachable, are brought safe through, by a simple dependent spirit, and are made wiser every day by their observation of what passes around them.

Many inferences and advices might be deduced from what has been said. I shall content myself with three.

1. Examine yourselves what understanding and experience you have of the things I mentioned under the first head. So much as you know of these, so far you are Christians, and no farther. "A form of godliness, without the power," 2 Tim. iii. 5. is one of the worst characters of the worst times; yet how common in the present day! How many who choose to be called christians, reject the testimony which God has given of his Son, deny the efficacy of his grace, speak of the new birth with disdain, as unintelligible and unnecessary, and account all that can be said of the life of faith (though founded upon express scripture, and attested by many witnesses) no better than enthusiastic jargon! But if you are thus minded, however sober your deportment, or professedly benevolent your disposition, though you may be applauded as a pattern of generosity, a philosopher, or a saint, by your acquaintance and neighbours, if the scriptures are true, you can be but as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal in the sight of God. You would have despised Thomas in your heart, if you had been witness to his joyful exclamation when he worshipped Jesus, and cried, "My Lord, and my God!" John xx. 28. You would have despised Paul as a dark enthusiast, had you heard him say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me," Gal. ii. 20. Yea,

you must have despised Jesus himself, if you had been present at his conference with Nicodemus. Our Lord Jesus is now in heaven, Thomas and Paul have been long dead; you cannot reach them: nor do they stand in your way: therefore, perhaps you are content to speak well of them in general terms. But those who come nearest to their language and spirit are the objects of your scorn and hatred. How then can you pretend to love him, or presume that he loves you? Jesus is worshipped in heaven; how then can you expect to come there? or what pleasure could you find there in your present turn of mind? O kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish: for in a little time his wrath will burn like fire.

But to every one who understands, embraces, and lives under the influence of these truths, I may safely apply our Lord's words, Matt. xvi. 17. "Blessed art thou," however despised by men, or chastened of the Lord; for "flesh and blood hath not revealed these things to thee;" thou hast assuredly received them from God by his Spirit. He alone is able to cause the light to shine into our dark hearts, "to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. Do not entertain hard and perplexing thoughts about the counsels of God, either respecting others or yourselves.

(1.) With regard to others. It is a frequent difficulty, either thrown in the way of inquirers after truth by the subtilty of Satan, or perhaps arising from the natural pride of the human heart, that would be thought able to account for every thing. I say, when they begin to apprehend the gospel way of salvation, this perplexing question arises, If things are so what will become of multitudes? What!

are all the heathens, mahommedans, papists, and even all the protestants, except the few who adopt these singular sentiments, to be lost? I shall not attempt to conquer this objection by dint of reasoning, but would rather persuade you to direct your reasonings another way. When the same question for substance was proposed to our Lord, his answer to those who asked him was, "Strive" (each one for yourselves) "to enter in at the strait gate," Luke xiii. 23, 24. Take care of yourselves, and leave the cases of others to the Lord. Remember he is God, and therefore just and good.

(2.) With regard to yourselves. Secret things belong to God; your business is with what is revealed. Some put the word of salvation from them perversely, and think, If the Lord designs me for eternal life, he will call me in his own time; till then I will go on in my sins. Those who can reason thus, and take encouragement to persist in wickedness, from the consideration of the power and efficacy of God's grace, do thereby avow themselves to be Satan's willing servants. But he terrifies many on whom he cannot thus prevail, with representing to them, that, let them do what they will, it is all in vain; unless the Lord has chosen them, notwithstanding any good beginnings they may hope he has wrought in them, they will come to nothing at last. It is your business to give all diligence to make your calling sure. If, by a humble waiting upon God, you are enabled to have your conversation according to the gospel, listen not to vain and perplexing reasonings, but commit yourself to the mercy and guidance of the Lord; and he, in his good time, will enable you to see, and to say, that it is not in vain to trust in him. Your path

shall be like the advancing light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The Lord has already provided all that you can reasonably desire.

[1.] The means are pointed out, in the use of which you are to be found, and wherein you may expect his blessing. These are chiefly secret prayer, the study of his written word, an attendance on the preached gospel, and free converse, as proper opportunities are afforded, with his believing people. If you continue in the observance of these, and act faithfully to the light you have already received, by breaking off from the evil practices of the world, and watching against those things which you yourself know to be evil, you will certainly gain ground in light, strength, and comfort. You will see more and more of the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel; and in proportion to your views, you shall be "changed into the same image from glory to glory." For,

[2.] The promise is sure. What God has said you may assuredly depend on. And what has he said? What indeed has he not said for the encouragement of those who are sincerely desirous to seek and serve him! "They that seek shall find. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry grounds. He giveth power to the weak; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength," Matt. vii. 7, 8. Isa. xl. 29, 31. Isa. xliv. 3.

If, therefore, you feel yourself a lost sinner, see a beauty and sufficiency in Jesus, have a hunger and thirst after his righteousness, and are made willing to expect the blessing in his way; you may look upon this as a token for good. Such views and

desires as these never are found in any heart till he communicates them. By nature we are averse and contrary to them. Give him the glory of what he has begun; and oppose your temptations, fears, and doubts, with this argument, drawn from your own experience, as the wife of Manoah formerly reasoned: If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, he would not have enabled and encouraged us to call upon him; neither would he at this time have shown us such things as these, Judges xiii. 23.

SERMON III.

THE CHARACTERS OF THOSE FROM WHOM THE GOSPEL DOCTRINES ARE HID.

MATTHEW XI. 25.

AT THAT TIME JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID, I THANK THEE, O FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, BECAUSE THOU HAST HID THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE AND PRUDENT, AND HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES.

THE judgments of God are a great deep. He does not give us a full account of his matters; much less can *we* by searching find out *him* to perfection. Yet if we carefully attend to what he has revealed, and apply his written word with humility and caution to what passes in ourselves, and around us, we may by his grace attain to some considerable satisfaction in things which at first view seem hard to be understood. The subject of my text is of this nature. That God should hide things of everlasting consequence from any person—sounds very harsh; but I hope, when the words are explained, we shall see, that though he acts as a Sovereign in his dispensations, his ways are just, and good, and equal.

We have already made an entrance upon this attempt. Besides some general observations in my first discourse, I endeavoured to show you, in the second, what the things are to which our Lord refers; when, and in what sense they are hid. I proceed now to consider,

III. From whom they are hid,—The wise and prudent. It will, I think, be readily supposed, that

the expression does not mean those who are truly so, and in God's account. He esteems none to be wise and prudent but those who are enlightened with his spiritual wisdom, who now serve and love him in Christ. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning" (or, as the word likewise signifies, the head or principal part) "of wisdom," Psa. cxi .10. and from such as these he hides or keeps back nothing that is profitable for them: on the contrary, that promise is sure, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant," Psa. xxv. 14. When our Lord said, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light," Luke xvi. 8. he did not mean they were so absolutely, for their boasted wisdom is the merest folly, but only that they acted consistently with their own principles. The wise and prudent here are either those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, or those who are generally so reputed by the bulk of mankind. And these two amount to the same: for as the natural wisdom of man springs from the same fountain—*self*, and is confined to the same bounds—*the things of time and sense*, in all alike, (though there is variety of pursuits within these limits, as tempers and situations differ,) men are generally prone to approve and applaud those who act upon their own principles.

We may take notice, then, as a key to this inquiry, that what is accounted wisdom by the world, is not only different from the wisdom of God, but inconsistent with it, and opposite to it. They differ as fire and water, light and darkness; the prevalence of the one necessarily includes the suppression of the other. See this at large insisted on by St.

Paul, in the beginning of his first epistle to the Corinthians, the first, second, and third chapters.

Who, then, are the wise and prudent intended in my text? May the Holy Spirit enable every conscience to make faithful application of what shall be offered upon this head.

1. In the judgment of the world, those are wise and prudent persons who are very thoughtful and diligent about acquiring wealth, especially if their endeavours are crowned with remarkable success. If a man thrives (as the phrase is) from small beginnings, and joins house to house, and field to field, so that he has land to call after his own name, and large possessions to leave to his children, how is he applauded, though at the same time envied, by most who know him! I do not deny, that a proper concern and industry in our secular calling is both lawful and our duty; and I allow, that the providence of God does sometimes remarkably prosper those who depend on him in the management of their business; but I make no scruple to affirm, that where this is the main concern, (as some call it,) such wisdom is madness. Such persons are no less idolaters than those who worship stocks and stones. And if the things of God are hid from them, it is surely their own fault; they do not even complain of it as a hardship; they have their choice, their reward, and are satisfied. They are told that these things are in Christ, and there they are content that they should remain; they see no beauty nor suitableness in *them*, they have no desire after *him;* he might keep his heaven and his truths to himself, if they could always have their fill of the world. They are told that these things are hid in the scripture, but they have neither leisure nor

inclination to search there for them. Their time is taken up with buying and selling, building, planting, &c. O beware of this wisdom. What will riches profit you in the day of wrath? Prov. xi. 4. at death or judgment? If you live and die in this spirit, you will bemoan your choice when it is too late.

2. Those are accounted wise and prudent, who think they have found a way to reconcile God and the world together. If a man should attempt to fly, or to walk upon the water, he would be deemed a fool. How is it that this endeavour, which is equally impossible, and expressly declared so by our Lord, should be more favourably thought of? The deceitfulness of the heart and the subtilty of Satan concur in this point. You will have a sort of religion, but then you take care not to carry things too far. You are governed by the fear and regard of men. Something you will do to satisfy conscience, but not too much, lest you hurt your interest, disoblige your friends, or draw on yourselves reproach, or a hard name. I must tell you from the word of God, your attempt to halve things is an abomination in his sight. Would it not be treason by the law, to pay the king an outward respect, and yet hold secret correspondence with his enemies? The decisions of the word of God are to the same effect in this instance. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John ii. 15. "Know ye not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God," James iv. 4.

3. A man is deemed wise, who has considerable

knowledge and curiosity about natural things, and all those subjects which usually bear the name of *science*: If he can talk of the magnitudes, distances, and motions of the heavenly bodies, can foretell an eclipse, has skill in mathematics, is well read in the history of ancient times, and can inform you what is found in books concerning the folly and wickedness of mankind who lived some thousands of years ago; or if he understands several languages, and can call a thing by twenty different names. It is true, when these attainments are sanctified by grace, they may in some respects have their use. But, in general, the best use a believer will or can make of them, is to lay them down at the foot of the cross. When a man possessed of a great quantity of these pebbles, has his conscience awakened, and his understanding enlightened, he is glad to renounce them all for the Pearl of great price, and to adopt the apostle's determination, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," 1 Cor. ii. 2. This was the effect when the word of God mightily grew and prevailed, Acts xix. 19, 20. We may at least say, that this kind of wisdom is for the most part dangerous and blinding to the soul.

(1.) It tends to feed and exalt self, to make a person something in his own eyes. To this we are prone enough by nature. An increase of unsanctified knowledge adds fuel to fire.

(2.) It engrosses the time and thoughts. Our minds are narrow, capable of attending to but few things at once: and our span is short, and will hardly admit of many excursions from the main concern. If we were to live to the age of Methuselah, we might pursue some things, which at present are highly improper and impertinent from this

consideration alone. A man that is upon an urgent affair of life and death, has no leisure for amusement. Such is our situation. We are creatures of a day. Time is vanishing, and eternity is at stake.

(3.) The delusion here is specious, and not easily discovered. A person with these accomplishments is not always enslaved to money, or to sensual pleasures; he therefore pities those who are, and comparing himself with others, supposes he is well employed, because his favourite studies are a check upon his appetites, and prevent his selling himself for gold, or running into riot with the thoughtless. Yet an attachment of this sort equally blinds him with respect to his true interest. Will the knowledge of books, or men, or stars, or flowers, purify the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? It is too plain, that the truths of the gospel are hid from none more effectually than from many of this character. None cast a more daring or public slight upon the revealed will of God, than some who are admired and applauded on account of their knowledge and learning.

(4.) Your nice and curious reasoners and disputers, that will see, as they profess, the bottom of every thing, and trust to their own judgment and inquiries, independent of the Spirit of God, are another sort of wise persons from whom these things are often and justly hid. And this character may be found in many, both learned and unlearned: for many have good-natural faculties, who have not had the advantages of learning and education. But this spirit is directly contrary to that simplicity, dependence, and obedience of faith which the

scripture exhorts us to seek after. Its effects are various.

[1.] Some (and those not a few) are led to reject the word of God altogether, because it evidently contains many things above their reason and contrary to their vain imaginations. And herein they contradict the most obvious principles of that reason which they lay claim to. A revelation from God can only be thought necessary or probable, on the supposition that it is to inform us of something which we could not have known without it. Therefore, to pretend to try the scripture-claim to this character, by such *criteria* or marks as we possess beforehand, is the same thing in effect as to determine to reject it without any trial at all.

[2.] When the scriptures, as to the letter, are acknowledged to be true, persons of this turn, presuming themselves sufficient judges of the sense, are helped by their ingenuity to explain away all the sublime doctrines of truth, so as to suit the prejudices and apprehensions of their own carnal minds. This, especially when joined with a smattering of learning, has been the chief source of all the errors and heresies which have pestered the church of God in all ages. This is a principal cause why the depravity of man by nature, the Deity and atonement of Christ, the operations of the Holy Spirit, and all the doctrines of grace, have been denied by men wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, though evidently contained in the book which they profess to receive as of Divine inspiration.

[3.] Even where the doctrines of grace have been notionally received, the same spirit of wisdom can still find occasion to work. When there

is more knowledge in the head than experience in the heart, many and various are the evils that often ensue. Disputes and hard questions are started, contentions and divisions multiplied, and people are more eager to perplex others than to edify themselves. Thus the name and counsels of God are profaned by an irreverent curiosity, and the clear express declarations of his will darkened by words without knowledge. When this natural wisdom puts on a spiritual appearance, no persons are more fatally deceived, or more obstinately hardened. They think they can learn no more, but are wise enough to teach every one: they neglect the use of God's appointed means themselves, and despise them in others; they are proud, censorious, obstinate, and full of conceit. Take care of Satan at all times, but especially when he would transform himself into an angel of light. There is reason to think the things of God are entirely hid, as to their power and excellence, from some who fondly dream that none are acquainted with them but themselves.

The consideration of this subject may lead to a variety of improvement. It may teach you,

1. What to fear—

(1.) A worldly spirit. This in a prevailing degree is inconsistent with a work of grace, and in whatever degree it obtains, or is indulged, will proportionably retard and abate the light and comfort of our souls. The cares and pleasures of this life are by our Lord compared to thorns, Matt. xiii. 22. unprofitable and painful; they produce no fruit, but they wound and tear. Yea, they are thorns in the eyes, Josh. xxiii. 13. which will prevent the great things of God from being perceived.

(2.) A spirit of self-dependence. "Be not wise in your own conceits," Rom. xii. 16. "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know," 1 Cor. viii. 2. God giveth wisdom to the lowly, but he confounds the devices of the proud. His promises of teaching, leading, and guiding, are made to the meek, the simple, and those who are little in their own eyes.

2. What to pray for. A simple child-like temper. That you may come to the word as to the light, and look beyond yourselves for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, without which your most laboured inquiries will only mislead you farther and farther from the truth.

3. How to examine yourselves. Not by your notions and attainments in knowledge, for these you may have in a considerable degree, and be wholly destitute of true grace. The word of God supposes it possible that persons may have great gifts, 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. flaming zeal, and much success, and yet, having no true love to God, be in his sight no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. But if you would know your state, examine your prevailing desires. Are your notions of grace effectual to lead you in the path of duty? Do you hunger and thirst for an increase of holiness? Does the knowledge you have of Christ lead you to love and trust him? Are you poor in spirit? You know nothing aright if you know not yourselves.

4. Ye that are believers may see cause to praise the Lord for his dispensations towards you.

(1.) Had you been wise in men's esteem, you might have continued fools to the end of your lives. If the Lord has taught you the secret of them that fear him, if he has shown you the way of salvation,

if he has directed your feet in the paths of his commandments, then you have the true wisdom, which shall be your light through life, and in death your glory. Therefore,

(2.) Be not grieved that ye are strangers to human wisdom and glory. These things which others so highly prize, you may resign contentedly, and say, "Lord, it is enough if thou art mine." Nay, you have good reason to praise his wisdom and goodness for preserving you from those temptations which have ensnared and endangered so many.

(3.) Do you desire more of this true wisdom? Seek it in the same way in which you have received the first beginnings. Be frequent and earnest in secret prayer. Study the word of God, and study it not to reconcile and make it bend to your sentiments, but to draw all your sentiments from it, to copy it in your heart, and express it in your conduct. Be cautious of paying too great a regard to persons and parties. One is your Master, even Christ. Stand fast in the liberty with which he has made you free; and while you humbly endeavour to profit by all, do not resign your understanding to any but to him who is the only wise God, the only effectual and infallible Teacher. Compare the experience of what passes within your own breast, with the observations you make of what daily occurs around you, and bring all your remarks and experiences to the touchstone of God's holy word. Thus shall you grow in knowledge and in grace; and amidst the various discouragements which may arise from remaining ignorance in yourselves or others, take comfort in reflecting, that you are drawing near to the land

of light, where there will be no darkness at all. Then you shall know as you are known; your love and your joy shall likewise be perfect, and you shall be satisfied with the rivers of pleasure which are before the throne of God, world without end.

SERMON IV.

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL REVELATION, AND WHO ARE FAVOURED WITH IT.

MATTHEW xi. 25.

AT THAT TIME JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID, I THANK THEE, O FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, BECAUSE THOU HAST HID THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE AND PRUDENT, AND HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES.

We proceed now to the more pleasing part of our subject. The great things of the gospel, though hid, are not lost: not hid as in the bottom of the sea; but he who hides them from the wise and prudent, is ready and willing to make them known to every sincere inquirer. This discovery, on the Lord's part, is a revelation, and the character of those who obtain it is expressed by the word "babes." Of the five particulars I proposed to consider from the text, these two yet remain to be spoken to.

IV. The saving knowledge of Divine truth is a revelation. Our Lord uses a parallel expression, when he commends Peter's confession of his faith, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Matt. xvi. 17. Peter had Moses and the prophets, so had the scribes and the pharisees; and after their manner they were diligent in reading and searching them. But that he could acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, when they rejected him, was because the Father

had revealed his truth to him, and given him a clearer knowledge of it than he could have received from the written word alone. But it may be proper to inquire into the meaning of this term—What are we here to understand by revelation?

Sometimes revelation is used in an extraordinary sense, as when of old the Lord made known to his servants, the prophets, those doctrines and events which till then were neither heard nor thought of. Of this we are not now to speak, but of that which is common to all believers, and necessary to salvation.

Now this revelation supposes the things to be revealed were real and certain before, but unknown, and not to be found out any other way.

Revelation is not the creation or invention of something new, but the manifestation of what was till then unknown. The great things of eternity, the glorious truths of the gospel, are real and certain in themselves already, and do not begin to be when we begin to be acquainted with them: yet till God is pleased to reveal them to the heart, we have no more spiritual and effective knowledge of them than if they were not. Ignorance of things very near to us, and in which we are nearly concerned, may be from two causes.

1. From a want of light. Nothing can be perceived in the dark. If you are in a dark room, though it is richly adorned and furnished, all is lost to you. If you stand in a dark night upon the top of a hill that commands a fine prospect, still you are able to see no more than if you were in a valley. Though you were in a dangerous place with pitfalls and precipices, and thieves and murderers all around you, still you might imagine yourself in safety, if you had no light with you.

2. It may be from some hinderance or obstruction between you and the object. Thus your dearest friend, or greatest enemy, might be within a few yards of you, and you know nothing of it, if there was a wall between you.

These comparisons may in some measure represent our case by nature. God is near; "in him we live, move, and have our being." Eternity is near; we stand upon the brink of it. Death is near, advancing towards us with hasty strides. The truths of God's word are most certain in themselves, and of the utmost consequence to us; but we perceive none of these things; we are not affected by them, because our understandings are dark, and because thick walls of ignorance, prejudice, and unbelief, stand before the eyes of the mind, and keep them from our view. Even those notions of truth which we sometimes pick up by hearing and reading, are but like windows in a dark room; they are suited to afford an entrance to the light when it comes, but can give no light of themselves.

I think, therefore, we may conclude, that God's revealing these things to us only signifies his effecting such a change in us by his Holy Spirit, as disposes and enables us to behold them. He sends a Divine light into the soul; and things begin to appear so plain, we wonder at our former stupidity that we could not perceive them before. By the power of his Spirit, he breaks down the walls which prevented and confined our views; and a new unthought-of prospect suddenly appears before us. Then the soul sees its danger: "I thought myself secure; but I find I am in the midst of enemies. Guilt pursues me behind; fear,

and the snare, and the pit, are before me; which way shall I turn?" Then it perceives its mistake: "While my views were confined, I thought there was nothing but the span of life to take care of; but now I see a boundless eternity beyond it." It obtains a glimpse likewise of the glories of the better world, of the beauties of holiness, of the excellency of Jesus. This light is at first faint and imperfect, but grows stronger by the use of appointed means; and as it is increased, every thing appears with a stronger evidence.

We may more particularly illustrate this work of the Holy Spirit, as it influences those leading faculties of the soul, the understanding, affections, and will. By nature, the will is perverse and rebellious, and the affections alienated from God: the primary cause of these disorders lies in the darkness of the understanding. Here then the change begins. The Spirit of God enlightens the understanding, by which the sinner perceives things to be as they are represented in the word of God; that he is a transgressor against the Divine law, and on this account obnoxious to wrath; that he is not only guilty, but depraved and unclean, and utterly unable, either to repair past evil, or to amend his own heart and life. He sees that the great God might justly refuse him mercy; and that he has no plea to offer in arrest of judgment. This discovery would sink him into despair, if it went no farther; but by the same light which discovers him to himself, he begins to see a suitableness, wisdom, and glory, in the method of salvation revealed in the gospel. He reads and hears concerning the person, sufferings, and offices of Christ, in a very different manner to what he did before: and as, by attend-

ing to the word and ministry, his apprehensions of Jesus and his understanding become more clear and distinct, a spiritual hope takes place, and increases in his soul; and the sure effect of this is, he feels his love drawn forth to Christ, who so loved him as to die for his sins. Beholding, by faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, as bleeding and dying upon the cross; and knowing for whom, and on what account, he suffered, he learns to hate, with a bitter hatred, those sins which nailed him there. The amazing love of Christ constrains him to account all things which he formerly valued as dross and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of his Saviour. Nor does his faith stop here; he views Him who once suffered and died, rising triumphant from the tomb, and ascending into heaven in the character of the Representative, Friend, and Fore-runner of his people. Having such a High Priest, he is encouraged to draw near to God, to claim an interest in the promises, respecting the life that now is, and that which is to come. Thus possessing, in the beginnings of grace, an earnest of the glory that shall be revealed, a real, universal, abiding change necessarily takes place in the affections. Now old things are passed away, and all things become new: the soul no longer cleaves willingly to the dust, nor can be satisfied with earthly things; but thirsts for communion with God, and an increase of holiness. Sin is no longer consented to, or delighted in, but is opposed and watched against; and every unhallowed deviation from the will of God excites the sincerest grief and humiliation, and leads to renewed application to the blood and grace of Jesus for pardon and strength. Thus the will likewise is brought into an unreserved sub-

jection and surrender to the power of Christ, and acts as freely in his service as it once did against him. For that what is termed "the freedom of the human will" should consist in a suspended indifference between good and evil, is a refinement, which, however admired and applauded by many, is equally contrary both to sound reasoning and to universal experience. The will, in all persons and cases, is determined by the present dictates of the understanding, and the bent of the affections.

By ascribing so much to the Spirit of God, I do not mean, as you may perceive by what I have just now said, to exclude his holy word, or preached gospel. All these truths and prospects are already contained in the word of God; but without the light of the Spirit they are not discerned. They are propounded to you in the public ministry. We testify again and again the things which we have seen and heard of the word of life; and when we are in some measure affected with their evidence, we are ready to wonder how any of you can possibly avoid perceiving them; till we remember how it was with ourselves, and then we know by our own experience that *we* must preach, and *you* hear in vain, unless the Lord is pleased to open your hearts. But observe,

(1.) The Spirit of God teaches and enlightens by his word as the instrument. There is no revelation from him, but what is (as to our perception of it) derived from the scripture. There may be supposed illuminations and strong impressions upon the mind, in which the word of God has no place or concern; but this alone is sufficient to discountenance them, and to prove that they are not from the Holy Spirit. For,

(2.) The scripture is the appointed rule and test by which all our searches and discoveries, all our acquisitions in religious knowledge, must be tried. If they are indeed from God, they will stand this trial, and answer to the word as face answers to face in a glass, but not otherwise. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isaiah viii. 20. If those who despise all claims to the influence of the Spirit of God as enthusiasm, had not been frequently informed, that we expect, we acknowledge no internal revelation, but by the medium of the word of God, and agreeable to it, they would be less inexcusable in repeating the charges of folly and infatuation, which they ignorantly fix upon the work of the Spirit, and all who profess a dependence on it. To those who are indeed candid and sincere inquirers after truth, what has been said upon this part of our subject, will, I hope, suggest the propriety of two directions. From hence learn,

[1.] To set a high value upon the word of God. All that is necessary to make you wise to salvation is there, and there only. In this precious book you may find a direction for every doubt, a solution of every difficulty, a promise suited to every circumstance you can be in. There you may be informed of your disease by sin, and the remedy provided by grace. You may be instructed to know yourselves, to know God and Jesus Christ, in the knowledge of whom standeth eternal life. The wonders of redeeming love, the glories of the Redeemer's person, the happiness of the redeemed people, the power of faith, and the beauty of holiness are here represented to the life. Nothing is

wanting to make life useful and comfortable, death safe and desirable, and to bring down something of heaven upon earth. But this true wisdom can be found no where else. If you wander from the scripture, in pursuit either of present peace, or future hope, your search will end in disappointment. This is the fountain of living waters: if you forsake it, and give the preference to broken cisterns of your own devising, they will fail you when you most need them. Rejoice, therefore, that such a treasure is put into your hand: but rejoice with trembling. Remember this is not all you want! unless God likewise gives you a heart to use it right, your privilege will only aggravate your guilt and misery. Therefore remember,

[2.] The necessity of prayer. For though the things of nearest consequence to you are in the bible, and you should read it over and over, till you commit the whole book to your memory; yet you will not understand, or discern the truth as it is in Jesus, unless the Lord the Spirit shows it to you. The dispensation of the truth is in his hand; and without him all the fancied advantages of superior capacity, learning, criticism, and books, will prove as useless as spectacles to the blind. The great encouragement is, that this infallible Spirit, so necessary to guide us into the way of peace, is promised to all who sincerely ask it. This Spirit Jesus is exalted to bestow: and he has said, "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Therefore water your reading with frequent prayer.—We proceed to,

V. The characters of those persons who succeed in their inquiries, and have the things of God savingly revealed to them; that are called babes.

1. They are for the most part babes in the world's esteem. They are despised by the wise and prudent for their weak capacities, small attainments, and their seeming insignificance in common life. But the Lord does not overlook any on these accounts. He is no respecter of persons. In the blessings of his common providence, those which are more immediately from his own hand, such as air and light, health and strength, the faculties of sight and hearing, &c. he bestows as freely, and in as great perfection, to the poor as to the rich, to the ignorant as to the learned. And thus it is with respect to his grace. Our incapacity is founded in our nature, and is common to all, and not in any particular circumstances. He is as ready to save the mean as the noble. Many of the great and wise are offended at this. As they engross the earth, they would willingly engross heaven also to themselves. But the Lord has appointed otherwise; and it has been one reproach constantly attending the gospel, that few but the common people have thought it worth their notice. Mark xii. 37; John vii. 48, 49.

2. They are babes in their own esteem. Not that some are more humble than others by nature, and therefore the Lord gives them a preference on that account; by nature we are all alike, equally destitute of the smallest good: but the expression teaches us, that those to whom the Lord is pleased to reveal these things, he first empties and humbles, strips them of all ground of boasting, and brings them to a dependence on himself. The true believer is frequently compared to a little child; and it is easy to trace an instructive resemblance.

(1.) A child or babe has little knowledge, and

its capacity and powers are as yet very feeble. All whose understandings have been spiritually enlightened, will acknowledge themselves children in this respect. The little they know convinces them of their ignorance. They are convinced that their views of things are faint, partial, confused; that their judgments are weak; that if the Lord prevents it not, they are very liable to be imposed on by the subtilty of Satan, and the treachery of their own hearts. They feel that they have not in themselves sufficiency to think a good thought.

(2.) A child is teachable. Conscious of their own ignorance, they listen to all about them, and think every one is qualified to teach them something. Among men none are truly teachable, but those who know they need to be taught. The natural man, if possessed of any advantages, thinks every one needs his help. The humble christian gives this proof, that the confession he is ready to make of his ignorance is genuine, and from his heart, that he is desirous to learn from all. He is swift to hear, slow to speak, and open to conviction. Though he will not assent to every thing he hears without proof or examination, yet he is disposed to receive instruction, and thankful to those by whom he is profited. He is fearful of being mistaken of giving way to prejudices, and therefore gladly improves every means of information.

(3.) A child is simple and dependent. He does not reason, but implicitly receives what he is told by his parents, or those whom he thinks wiser than himself. Such a resignation, indeed, the believer dares not make of his understanding to any men,

however highly he may esteem them in the main; for he has learned from the word of God, not to put his trust in man; but this is the desire of the renewed heart; with respect to the teaching of God's word and Spirit. He allows no reasoning or questioning here; nor will he say with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" It is enough for him that God has said it, and is able to make it good. This is a happy temper. In this way innumerable difficulties that arise from appearances and sophisms are avoided; and the mind, by faith, steers in safety across the immense ocean of conjectures and opinions, which disputants and reasoners, essaying to do, are sunk and overpowered. It is true, there are various degrees of this simplicity: and in those who possess it in a larger measure, there is a remaining principle of pride and unbelief, which costs them much prayer and many conflicts to subdue. But this, in some degree, is essential to the character of those who are taught of God; they desire and endeavour to submit wholly to his guidance and will in all things.

Here, then, is a proper topic for self-examination. Let each one ask his heart, Have I this simple child-like disposition?

If you have, if it is the desire of your soul to be taught of God, if his word is your rule, if you depend on his Spirit to teach you all things, and to lead you as it were by the hand, sensible that unless you are thus led and guided, you shall certainly go astray; be thankful for this, accept it as a token for good. You were not always so: there was a time when you were wise in your own eyes, and prudent in your own sight. You have good warrant to hope that the Lord, who has already taught you to

depend on himself, will show you all that is necessary for you to know.

But if this is not the case, if you lean to your own understanding, what wonder is it that you are still walking in darkness and uncertainty? Will you say, I have read the bible diligently; I have taken no small pains to examine things, to see which of the many divisions that obtain among christians is possessed of the truth; but I am still at a loss. Surely, if the tenets some plead for had been in the scripture, I should have found them there! I answer, without detracting from your sagacity or your sincerity, your case is easily accounted for from the verse we are upon, if your inquiries are not conducted in a humble dependence upon the Spirit of God. Too many instances we could produce of men, who having laboured for years in what seems one of the most laudable undertakings, the explanation of the scriptures for the use of others, have at last been in a remarkable degree unsettled themselves; and the only visible fruits their reading and industry have afforded, have been error, invective, and dissatisfaction; so that their labours have been an exemplification of the former part of our text, a proof in point how entirely the things of God are often hid from the wise and prudent.

You that are seeking the Lord, and are little in your own eyes, rejoice that the dispensation of grace is in His hands. If men had the disposal of it, you might perhaps have been overlooked. We should have been ready to have accepted the fair-spoken young man, who accosted our Lord with so much outward respect, and had so much to say in his own behalf, Mark x. 20. and probably we should have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a wretch,

as he deserved. "But the Lord seeth not as man seeth," 1 Sam. xvi. 7. "His ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts." Therefore there is encouragement for the meanest and the vilest. He has excluded none but those who exclude themselves. "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation. Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," Isaiah lv. 7. 9.

SERMON V.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE ASSERTED AND ILLUSTRATED

MATTHEW xi. 26.

EVEN SO, FATHER, FOR SO IT SEEMED GOOD IN THY SIGHT.

THAT the doctrine in the preceding verse is true in fact, is sufficiently evident from common observation. The greatest part of those whom the world esteems wise and prudent, and all to a man who think themselves so, pay but small regard to the truths of the gospel. They are hid from their eyes, and revealed to babes, to those whom they despise on account of their ignorance and insignificance. And if a few who are favoured with considerable advantages in point of genius, education, or rank, do receive the truth in the love of it, they have been at least taught that they are no better than babes, and are glad to count all outward things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

If we could give no other reason for this dispensation of grace, than that which is assigned in our text, it ought to be satisfactory; and would be so, if it were not for the pride of our hearts. Surely that which seems good in the sight of God, must be holy, and wise, and good in itself. How vain and presumptuous is blinded man, who would dare to reply against his Maker, to charge his holiness with injustice, his wisdom with mistake, his goodness

with partiality! All their vain cavils will be silenced at the great day, when the secrets of all hearts are opened, and God will be justified when he condemns. However, though we dare not venture too far into the depths of the Divine counsels, yet, from the light he has afforded us in his word, we may, in our feeble manner, assert and prove that his ways are just and equal: and, besides the argument of his sovereignty, "That so it has pleased him," he has been pleased to favour us with some of the reasons "why it has so pleased him." And this is the subject I propose to lead your meditations to from these words. May his Spirit assist me, that I may not darken counsel by words without knowledge.

Let us begin with inquiring, What might be his principal ends in sending his Son into the world, that we might have life through him?—These I apprehend were chiefly two.

1. The redemption and complete salvation of all that believe. All mankind are by nature in the same state of sin and misery. But we are told, that at the great day there will be an unspeakable difference in the circumstances between some and others. Many will then stand trembling at his left hand, to whom the King shall say, "Depart." But those on the right hand will hear those joyful words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." If you ask, To what is this difference primarily owing? The answer is provided: "Jesus loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood; he redeemed them, out of every nation, and people, and language; they came out of great tribulation, and washed their

robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne." It was then for their sakes, who should be hereafter found at the right hand of God, that "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

2. But besides this, God had another and a still higher end in the work of redemption, namely, the manifestation of his own glory. It was unspeakable love to us that he provided the means of salvation at all; and we cannot wonder, much less ought we to complain, that in justice to himself he appointed such means, and such a way, as that all the praise and glory of the contrivance should in the end redound to himself alone. In order to this, it was necessary that the following things should be manifested with the fullest evidence.

(1.) The greatness of man's depravity, guilt, and misery: that it was not a small thing, but a case worthy the interposition of almighty power and infinite grace.

(2.) The utter insufficiency of man to relieve himself; that so God might have the whole honour of his recovery, and we might be for ever debtors to his free undeserved mercy.

(3.) That whereas there are, to outward appearance, a great variety of characters among mankind, it was necessary the dispensation of his grace should be so conducted as to show, that no case was too hard for his power, or too low and miserable for his compassion and condescension.

Upon these grounds we may see something of his wisdom in the methods he has appointed, and in the subjects of his choice; why it has seemed

good in his sight, to hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes; for such reasons as these:

[1.] To stain the pride of all human glory.

[2.] To exclude every pretence of boasting.

[3.] That there might be a ground of hope provided for the vilest and meanest.

[4.] That the salvation of believers might be sure, and not subject to miscarry.

[1.] The Lord of hosts hath proposed it, "to stain the pride of all human glory," Isaiah xxiii. 9. How much men are disposed to admire their own wisdom, learning, and fancied accomplishments, is sufficiently obvious. But now the pride of all this glory is stained, inasmuch as it is proved by experience to be utterly useless in the most important concerns. One man has talents to rule a kingdom, but is himself a slave to the vilest lusts and passions. Another has courage to face death in a field of battle; yet, with regard to religion, is a mere coward: overawed by the feeble breath of the multitude, he is both ashamed and afraid to practise what his conscience convinces him is his duty. Another almost pretends to count the number of the stars, and to call them all by their names; yet has no more thought of the God that made the heavens and the earth, than the beasts that perish. Another delights in books and languages which few can understand but himself; nothing so false or foolish but he accounts it worth his study, if it has but the stamp of antiquity to recommend it; only the book of God, (though much more ancient than all his fables,) because it may be read in plain English, is thrown by as unworthy his notice. Another, who professes to be

scripture-wise, perverts the scripture, and abuses his own reason, to establish the most absurd errors, or to overturn the plainest truths. Another amuses himself with setting forth the praises of virtue and morality, while his own conduct furnishes a standing proof, either of the weakness of his scheme, or the insincerity of his heart. Time would fail to recount all the achievements of these wise and prudent men. But behold the pride of them all stained! In the midst of all their acquisitions and inventions, they are strangers to God, to themselves, and to peace; they are without Christ, and without hope; those things which alone are of real importance are hid from their eyes. Here the desperate depravity and deceitfulness of the heart are manifested, to the glory of God; and it is clearly seen, that if he does not interpose to save, men are wholly unable to save themselves.

[2.] To exclude boasting. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded." As the apostle speaks afterwards, "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory," Rom. iv. 2. So, if men were saved, either in whole or in part, by their own wisdom and prudence, they might in the same degree ascribe the glory and praise to themselves. They might say, My own power and wisdom gave me this; and thus God would be robbed of the honour due to his name. But now this is prevented. The word of the Lord is, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord," Jer. ix. 23, 24. For whatever outward advantages some may seem to

possess, as to the things of God, they stand altogether upon a level with the meanest. These things cannot be understood by any sagacity on our parts, but must be revealed by the Father of lights. What could be done in this way, you may collect from St. Paul's representation in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. Many of the heathens were eminent for wisdom and abilities, and made great proficiency in science; but with regard to the knowledge of God, the result of all their researches was error, superstition, and idolatry; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and their disquisitions had no other effect than to leave them without excuse. Their practice, as will always be the case, was correspondent to their principles; and in the midst of a thousand refinements in theory, they were abandoned to the grossest and most detestable vices. If it be said, These had not the light of revelation, we may observe the same or similar effects where the gospel is known. With this superior light, men are still equally vain in their imaginations; and though they do not pay an outward and formal worship to stocks and stones, they are gross idolaters; for they serve, love, and trust the creature more than the Creator. When there is a difference, it is owing to grace, and grace is acknowledged. Such will readily say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise," Psa. cxv. 1. Thus all pretence to boasting is effectually excluded; and he that can glory upon good grounds, must glory only in the Lord.

If it should be supposed that this representation of things tends to discourage a diligent and serious

inquiry after truth, I answer, When rightly understood, it will have just the contrary effect. What can be more suited to excite diligence, than to point out the method in which it will assuredly be crowned with success? You cannot succeed without the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit; but if conscious of this, and aware of your own insufficiency, you will seek his direction and guidance by humble prayer, it shall be afforded you. If you know not this, you will certainly be wearied in the end by repeated disappointments; but if you depend upon his teaching and co-operation in the use of the means he has appointed, your knowledge shall advance as the growing light.

[3.] This method of the Divine procedure opens a door of hope to the vilest and the meanest. Let not any be cast down on account of any peculiar incapacity or difficulty in their case. If none but the wise and the learned, the rich, and those who are esteemed well-behaved and virtuous, could be saved, or if these stood in a fairer way for it than others, the greatest part of mankind might give up hope, and sit down in despair at once. But the case is exactly the reverse. It is true, the persons I am speaking of are not the worse for these distinctions, whenever they are sensible how vain and insufficient they are, and betake themselves as poor, helpless, miserable, blind, and naked, to flee for refuge to the mercy of God in Christ. But, alas! their supposed qualifications too often harden them to reject the counsel of God against themselves. They think themselves whole, and therefore see not the necessity or value of the Physician. You who are sensible you have nothing of your own to trust

to, take encouragement; the Lord has suited his gospel to your circumstances.

Are ye *poor?* The Lord Jesus Christ has sanctified the state of poverty by taking it on himself. He had not where to lay his head. He will not therefore despise you on this account. Only pray that you may likewise be poor in spirit. He looks through all outward distinctions, and often passes by a palace to make his presence and power known in a mud-walled cottage. Perhaps he appointed this state in mercy to your souls, that you might not be distracted with many things, nor take up with a portion in this world. You cannot be in a lower or more afflicted state than Lazarus, who, while he lay neglected at the rich man's gate, oppressed with want, and full of sores, was a child of God, and the charge of angels.

Are you *ignorant?* If you cannot read, you miss indeed a considerable advantage which you might derive from the perusal of his good word, and I would wish you to attain it if practicable. If not, give so much more diligent attention to the preaching of the gospel; entreat others to read the scriptures to you. But especially pray. The Lord can teach you without a book, and make up for every defect. It is very possible for you to attain to know and love God, to love your neighbour, to rejoice in Christ, to keep his precepts, to be content with your station, to live by faith, and to die with comfort, though you cannot distinguish one letter from another. The prophet Isaiah, in the prospect of gospel times, gives a description of the way of salvation, which is peculiarly suited for your comfort. "And a high way shall be there, and a

way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein," Isa. xxxv. 8.

Have you been notorious *open sinners?* Then you are in the less danger of trusting to your own righteousness. And as to the rest, if you are sick of sin, if you sincerely desire to be freed, as well from the power as from the guilt of it, you stand as fair for salvation as the most sober and regular person upon the earth. St. Paul, speaking to those who had been partakers of the saving grace of God, after he had made an enumeration of the blackest sins which man can be guilty of, adds, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11.

[4.] In this way the salvation of believers is sure. If it depended on any thing in man, it might miscarry. Man's boasted wisdom is soon changed. A few hours of a fever, a small blow on the head, may change a wise man into a fool. "But it is of grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed," Rom. iv. 16. Adam had a stock of wisdom, yet when he was trusted with his own happiness, he could not preserve it. But the second Adam is all-sufficient. Our dependence is upon him. To those who are babes he is wisdom. righteousness, sanctification, and all that they want. If this concern had been left to the wisdom of man, it is most probable that Christ would have lived and died in vain, without a single real disciple. But now the dispensation of grace is in his hands, we are sure that some will believe in him; and we

are likewise sure, that those who truly do so shall never be ashamed of their hope.

Now, from what has been said,

1. Inquire what is the temper of your minds with regard to this appointment. Our Lord rejoiced in it as the wise and holy will, the good pleasure of his heavenly Father. If you are displeased at it, is it not a proof that you have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus? If God *wills* one thing, and you *will* another, where must the contention end? To what purpose, or with what pretence, can you use that expression in the Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done," when in effect your hearts rise with enmity against it? This is one topic from whence we may confirm the declaration of scripture, that man by nature is not only a transgressor of the law, but an enemy, yea enmity itself against God, Rom. viii. 7. They may pay some profession of regard to the power that made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and the fountains of water, while they worship they know not what, according to their own vain and dark imaginations. But the attributes and characters of God revealed in scripture, his holiness, justice, truth, and sovereignty, they cannot bear. They are enemies to the declared strictness of his moral government, and enemies to the methods by which he has proposed to communicate his grace. But he is God, and who can control him? Who can say unto him, What hast thou done? You must either submit to his golden sceptre in time, or his rod of iron will fall upon you for ever.

2. Does it not appear from hence, that the doctrine of free sovereign grace is rather an encourage-

ment to awakened and broken-hearted sinners than otherwise? If you are most unworthy of mercy, and destitute of every plea, should you not be glad to hear, that the Lord does not expect worthiness in those whom he saves, but that he himself has provided the only plea which he will accept, and a plea which cannot be over-ruled, the righteousness and mediation of his well-beloved Son?

SERMON VI.

OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW XI. 27.

ALL THINGS ARE DELIVERED UNTO ME OF MY FATHER: AND NO MAN KNOWETH THE SON, BUT THE FATHER; NEITHER KNOWETH ANY MAN THE FATHER, SAVE THE SON, AND HE TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL HIM.

THE two preceding verses have led us to consider grace (if I may so speak) in the unfathomable depths of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. In this verse, our Lord calls us to the contemplation of his own glorious person, authority, and fulness. In him grace is treasured up as in a repository for communication, to be dispensed to needy perishing sinners.

When an ambassador is deputed from an earthly prince, to transact some business of great importance, he produces his commission and authority, without which all he could propose would be little regarded; and those who are most honoured and attended to, are intrusted with full powers, that is, with a liberty to act and propose as occasions offer, without farther instructions, and with full security that the king will ratify and confirm whatever they agree to, in the same manner as if he had done it in his own person. Thus, if we may presume to compare small things with great, our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Messenger of the Father's love, before he invites every weary heavy-laden sinner to come to him, with a gracious assurance

that he will receive, and pardon, and save them all, he condescends in this verse, as it were, to open his commission, to instruct us in his own personal dignity, and to communicate to us the example and unlimited authority which he has received from God to treat with rebels. He knows what hearts of unbelief we have; how greatly an awakened conscience is terrified with guilt; how busy Satan is to urge us to question either his ability or his willingness to save; and therefore he would leave nothing undone that might encourage us to come to him, and find rest for our souls. May his gracious Spirit enable me to speak aright, and so open your hearts to understand what may be said upon this high subject, that we may have joy and peace in believing.

The words contain a threefold declaration.

I. Of his person: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son."

II. Of his authority: "All things are delivered to me of my Father."

III. Of his office: summarily intimated in the expression, "He to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

To treat these points in their proper extent, would be a subject more than equal to the abilities and life of man. Much would be left unsaid at last. We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. This is a theme fit for an angel's tongue; the most exalted angel, or all the angels in heaven, would be unable to comprehend it, for it is infinite, as our text declares. None knows the Son, but the Father. Here we are too prone to think highly of our own knowledge; but when we

arrive in yonder world of light, to see him "as he is," we shall be ashamed of the highest conceptions we had of him, and of our most laboured attempts to express them, while we were imprisoned in this distant land. Then we shall say with the queen of Sheba, "Behold the half, the thousandth part was not told us." In the mean time, he is pleased to accept our imperfect stammerings, to assist our feeble inquiries, and does not disdain, as he justly might, to hear us take his name upon our polluted lips.

I. The inconceivable dignity of his person is pointed out by two expressions.

1. "No man" (or rather, as it might be rendered here and in many other places, "No one, Οὐδεὶς) knoweth the Father but the Son." No one.

(1.) Not the wisest man in a state of nature. Various degrees of knowledge there are amongst the sons of men. There is a great difference between man and man—between one who knows not his letters, or any thing beyond the bounds of his own village; and another who has a large acquaintance with arts and sciences, history and languages, and has surveyed the manners and boundaries of many nations. But, with regard to the knowledge of Christ, the philosopher and the shepherd, the king and the beggar, are just upon a level. Of two blind men, one may know many things more than the other, but with regard to the knowledge of light and colours, they will be both ignorant alike.

Some of you perhaps think yourselves wiser than many of your neighbours. But I cannot too often remind you, that if you know not Christ,

all your wisdom is folly, and you will find it so at last.

(2.) Neither do Christ's own people know him in the sense of the text. Some knowledge of him indeed they have, which is their differencing character from the world But how small a portion! That they know him a little, is plain, because they love him and trust him; but how little, is plain likewise, because their love is so faint, and their trust so feeble. Their doubts, fears, complaints, and backslidings, are so many mournful proofs that they are but poorly acquainted with him, and sufficiently evidence, that a great part of what we account our knowledge, is not real and experimental, but notional only. The literal sense of what we read concerning Jesus, is attainable by study and human teaching; but the spiritual import can only be received from Him who teaches the heart, who increases it in us by the various exercises and dispensations we pass through; and the best have much more to learn than they have already attained. There are indeed happy moments when he manifests himself to the eye of faith, in his glory, and in his love, as he did to Peter in the mount, and to Thomas, when a sight of his wounds conquered his unbelief, and made him in a transport of joy cry out, "My Lord, and my God." But these visits, though they have a powerful influence to conquer sin and fear, are transient; and when the cause is withdrawn, there is a proportionable abatement in the effect. The knowledge of Christ, in the present life, may be compared to the knowledge which a shepherd has of the sea, from having viewed it from the top of a cliff. In a sense it may be said, he has seen the

sea; but how little has he seen in comparison of what lies beyond the reach of his eye! How inadequate is such a prospect to give him an idea answerable to the length, and breadth, and depth of the immense ocean! Nay, farther,

(3.) The glorified saints, and holy angels, who behold as much of his glory as creatures can bear, do not know him as he is. They are filled with his power and love. He comprehends them, but they cannot him. A vessel cast into the sea, can but receive according to its capacity. Thus are they filled with his fulness till they can hold no more; but his glory still remains infinite and boundless. The glorious seraphims, therefore, are represented as hiding their faces with their wings, unable to bear the splendour of his presence. For,

(4.) "None knows the Son but the Father." This proves his Divinity. God only knows himself. The Son is his eternal Word, his eternal Wisdom, and therefore beyond the highest reach of finite understanding.

2. "None knows the Father but the Son." Here I might repeat the former particulars. God has made something known of himself in his works, much in his word, more still in his grace. All men have some faint perceptions of his power and presence. He manifests himself to his own family below, still more to his family above; yet, after all, he is said to dwell in light, which no man can approach. None knows him but the Son, and he knows him perfectly, knows the incomprehensible God; therefore he is God himself. As he said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," John xiv. 9.

Now, if we had no other proof of this doctrine

but the passage before us, since this is the declaration of the true and faithful Witness, it should be accepted as decisive. But as this is the great mystery of godliness, the pillar and ground of truth, the foundation of all our hopes, I shall take this opportunity to confirm it more largely from other concurrent testimonies of scripture.

By the Son, I mean the person who spake these words: "He who was foretold by the prophets: who in the fulness of time came into the world; who with respect to his Divine nature, is called the Word," John i. 1. and with respect to his human nature, was born of the virgin Mary: he who was known upon earth by the name of Jesus; whose history is related by the evangelists; who suffered a shameful and accursed death upon the cross, without the gates of Jerusalem. Of him we affirm, "That he was, and is the true God, and eternal life," 1 John v. 20. In proof of this, besides what has been already said, let the following particulars be considered.

(1.) That the proper and peculiar titles of God are attributed to him frequently in the scriptures; so frequently, that it would be a very long task to transcribe them all. Let a few, the application of which to Christ is express and indisputable, suffice for a specimen: "The Word was God:" "His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us:" "Jehovah our Righteousness:" "The mighty God." In the same style he speaks of himself by his servants, the prophets and apostles; "Thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called." "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of

the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Almighty," John i. 1. Matt. i. 23. Jer. xxiii. 6. Isaiah ix. 6. liv. 5. xlv. 22. Rev. i. 8. 11.

Amidst the variety of testimonies which might be adduced to this purpose, there are two which are peculiarly observable. The psalmist expresses the majesty, power, and immutability of God, in these sublime terms: "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end," Psa. cii. 25—27. Surely none can deny but this ascription must be incommunicably due to the Almighty; yet the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, chap. i. 10—12. applies these words directly to the Son of God. The other passage I intend is the vision of Isaiah, recorded in his sixth chapter; which not only proves the point in hand, but irrefragably establishes the doctrine of the Trinity. For the Lord of hosts whom Isaiah saw and heard, is affirmed by St John to have been the Son, John xii. 41. by St Paul to have been the Holy Ghost, Acts xxviii. 25. Isaiah, therefore, had a manifestation of what was afterwards in explicit words set forth to the faith of the church "that there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one," 1 John v. 7.

(2.) His works upon earth were such as necessarily suppose a Divine power. Who can control the elements, raise the dead, command the devils,

search the heart, and forgive sin, but God alone? Mark iv. 39. John xi. 43. Luke iv. 36. Mark ii. If it should be said, that many of his servants and followers wrought miracles equal to his, by a delegated power, and therefore this argument is not conclusive; I answer, There is an apparent difference in the manner of their working, which proves the disparity between them and Him. They could do nothing but in His name, and by His power; they usually addressed themselves to Him by prayer, and always ascribed the praise and glory to Him, Acts iii. 12—16. But his power was independent, sovereign, and unlimited: "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." At the breath of his rebuke, the raging tempest and the boisterous seas were instantly hushed into a perfect calm. The deaf heard his voice, and the dead came forth from their graves, at the first call.

(3.) His works of office can be performed by none but God. This might be proved concerning each of the offices he exercises in consequence of his high character, as Mediator between God and man; but I shall speak only of two.

[1.] It is his office to keep his believing people in this present evil world. To act the part of a shepherd towards them, (Matt. ii. 6. ποιμανει) to supply their wants of every kind, to direct their steps, to control their enemies, to over-rule all things for their good, and to be a very present help in every time of trouble; to execute this important charge, it is necessary that his knowledge, his compassion, his power, and his patience, must be boundless. His eye must be every moment upon all their cases at once; his ear must be incessantly open to receive the prayers of all people, nations,

and languages; his arm must be continually stretched out to support so many that stand, to raise up so many that fall, to afford seasonable and suitable supplies, at the same instant, to the distresses and temptations of millions. If this is the office he has undertaken, and if he is acknowledged sufficient and faithful in the discharge of it, what more undeniable evidence can be given, that he has all the attributes we can conceive as essential and peculiar to the Godhead? The provocations, defects, and backslidings of his people, are likewise so numerous, so often repeated, and attended with such black aggravations, that if he was not God invincible in goodness, unchangeable in purpose, if his mercy was not, as is his majesty, infinite, he would be wearied out, and provoked to cast them off for ever. The great reason why he bore with his people of old, holds equally strong with respect to us: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," Mal. iii. 6.

[2.] The like may be said of the high office, character, and appointment, he has received to be the Judge of the world, of angels, and of men. For, besides that it is quite incredible, that God, who is jealous of his glory, should intrust this most illustrious prerogative to any mere creature, it seems evident at first sight, that no creature can be possibly qualified for the discharge of it. To the great and final Judge all hearts must be open, all desires known, and every secret disclosed. He must be intimately acquainted with the counsels and plans that lay hid in God from eternity; he must have a sovereign, comprehensive, intuitive view of every event, of every design, that took place within the limits of time and creation; he must have unli-

mited authority to pronounce the decisive sentence which will fix the everlasting state of all intelligent beings, and uncontrolled power for the immediate and irrevocable execution of his supreme decree. And what higher than this can our most laboured conceptions reach of the Almighty God! If it be said, that Christ will act by a delegated authority, we answer, It is a contradiction to say, that God *can* delegate his *omniscience* to a creature; and without this attribute, any assignable measure of wisdom or power would be insufficient. The power and fulness of the Godhead must so reside in the Judge, as justly to denominate him to be "God over all, blessed for ever," Rom. ix. 5. And this the scripture assures us is the case in fact. The man Christ Jesus, who is appointed the Judge of quick and dead, is so intimately and essentially united to, and inhabited by the Deity, Col. ii. 9. that he is the proper object of our faith, as the true God, and eternal life.

(4.) The honours he claims from us afford a further argument for his proper Divinity. He challenges our supreme love, obedience, trust, and worship: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." "That all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life." "I am the Light of the world." "I am the resurrection and the life," John xiv. 1. vi. 55. v. 23. x. 27, 28. viii. 12. xi. 25. If we could suppose an apostle or an angel speaking of himself in terms like these, requiring our unlimited dependence, and directing our hope

and love to center wholly on him, we might justly reject him as a blasphemer. How the apostles understood these expressions, and that they did not mistake our Lord's meaning, is evident from the behaviour of Thomas. He saluted his risen Saviour, "My Lord and my God," John xx. 28. Had his transport of joy carried him too far in giving this ascription to Jesus, he would doubtless have corrected him, and provided us with a caution against committing the like fault. For who that has tasted His love, and been made partaker of the power of his resurrection, can avoid adoring him with the utmost homage their words can express, or their hearts conceive!

From hence we may take occasion to observe,

1. His wonderful condescension; that, for us and our salvation he stooped so low, drew a vail over his eternal glories, and appeared in the form of a servant, to suffer, and to die: "Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich," 2 Cor. viii. 9. This was love passing knowledge, to pour out his blood, his life, his soul, for those who by nature and practice were enemies and rebels, disobedient to his government, and averse to his grace.

2. What a blessed and glorious hope is set before awakened sinners! Add to the consideration of his person, what we have yet to offer from the word of God concerning his authority and purpose, and say if these truths do not give sufficient encouragement to believe and be saved.

3. How awful must be the case of those who shall be found in final rebellion against him, and die in a state of impenitence and unbelief! Alas! poor obstinate sinners who have stood out so long,

will you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and rush, like the thoughtless horse in the battle, upon your own destruction? Do you consider whom you are opposing? "Did ever any harden himself against the Lord, and prosper?" Job ix. 4. "Have you an arm like God, or can you thunder with a voice like him?" Job xl. 9. Where will you stand, or what will you say, "when he shall arise to shake terribly the earth? when he shall be revealed in fire, to take vengeance on all that know not God, and obey not the gospel," 2 Thess. i. 8. O kiss the Son, throw down your arms, and fall prostrate at his footstool, lest his anger awake, and you perish without hope; for in a little time the great day of his wrath will be revealed, which will burn like "a furnace, and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch," Mal. iv. 1. Then will it appear, that those, and those only are blessed, who put their trust in him. For those who trust in him shall never be ashamed: but "when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory," Col. iii. 4.

SERMON VII.

OF THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW XI. 27.

ALL THINGS ARE DELIVERED UNTO ME OF MY FATHER: AND NO MAN KNOWETH THE SON, BUT THE FATHER: NEITHER KNOWETH ANY MAN THE FATHER, SAVE THE SON, AND HE TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL HIM.

We have spoken something of the dignity and excellence of that Mighty One on whom our help is laid; and are now to consider,

II. The covenant-authority he is intrusted with to manage the great concerns of man's salvation. He is not only infinitely sufficient, but divinely appointed for this great work.

Of this covenant there is express mention in many parts of scripture, to some of which I have referred in the note.* It is styled the *covenant* of peace, the everlasting ordered and sure covenant. The power and efficacy of this covenant respected the future incarnation of our Saviour. He asserted his right, while in the form of a servant, in the words of my text; and to the same purpose are the words of John the Baptist: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath delivered all things into his hands," John iii. 35. But the full manifestation of it was deferred to the time of his resurrection, when, and by which, he was declared to be the Son of God with power, Rom. i. 4. Hence, before

* Psalm lxxxix. 19. Prov. viii. 23. Isai. xlii. 1—6. compared with Matt. xii. 18—21. Isaiah xlix. 8, 9. Zech. vi. 13.

he left his disciples, he assured them, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," Matt. xxviii. 18.

The sum is, that our Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of his Divine nature, and his voluntary undertaking in our flesh, to fulfil all righteousness for us, both as to obedience and satisfaction, is exalted in that nature wherein he suffered, to be the sovereign Judge and Lord of all, Phil. ii. 6—11. He it is now with whom we have to do. The holy God, considered without respect to the covenant of grace, is a consuming fire to sinners; and we cannot stand before him. But now he reveals himself, he dwells as in his temple, in the man Christ Jesus. He has intrusted all his glory, and all his grace in his hands; and to him we are to look, on him we are to depend, for all the blessings we need for time and eternity. For "all things are delivered to him of the Father." "All things," is a most comprehensive expression. We may distribute it as referring to all persons, all blessings, and all dispensations.

1. All persons are in his hands. Hence his sublime title, "King of kings, and Lord of lords," Rev. xix. 16. He doth what he will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth. Dan. iv. 35. Thus Isaiah saw his glory, and spake of him, Isaiah vi. compared with John xii. 39—41.

(1.) He is Lord over his enemies, and those that hate him. He rules them with a rod of iron, and so disposes their designs as to make them, though against their wills, the means and instruments of promoting his own purposes and glory, Psa. ii. 9. They are his servants even when they rage

most against him. He has a bridle in their mouths to check and turn them at his pleasure. He can and often does control them when they seem most sure of success, and always sets them bounds, which they cannot pass. So he showed his power over Pharaoh of old; the haughty king's resistance only gave occasion for a more glorious display of the greatness and goodness of the God of Israel. So he humbled the pride of Herod, and gave him up in the midst of his guards, a prey to worms, Acts xii. 23. And thus, sooner or later, all his enemies are brought to lick the dust before him.

(2.) But especially, he is Lord of his own people. By nature indeed they likewise are his enemies, but he knows them all by name. They have been in a peculiar manner given him by the Father, John xvii. 6. he accounts them his portion, and he will not lose his own, John x. 15, 16. He knows where to find them, and when to call them; and when his time is come, one word or look from him can disarm them in a moment, and bring them humbly to his feet. How soon did he stop and change the persecuting Saul! Acts ix. When they are thus made willing in the day of his power, he takes them under his special care; and whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye. He guides, and guards, and feeds, and strengthens them; he keeps them night and day, waters them every moment, and will not suffer any to pluck them out of his hand, nor will he himself leave them or forsake them, till he has done all that he has spoken to them of. He gives them likewise a new heart and gracious dispositions, suited to the honourable relation he has brought them into; so that they delight in his precepts, and yield him a cheerful, habitual,

and universal obedience from the constraining sense they have received of his inexpressible love.

2. All blessings are at his disposal. Is not this a welcome declaration to awakened souls? What is the blessing you want? Seek to Jesus, and you shall not be disappointed. Hear his gracious invitation, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.—Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live," Isaiah lv. 1, 3. The promised blessings which he holds in his hands, are the very same that the awakened enlightened conscience must have, and can have only from him.

(1.) Pardon. How needful, how valuable is the pardon of sin to those who know what sin is, what it deserves, and what a share they have in it! Such are incapable of taking comfort till they know how God may be reconciled, and sin forgiven. These are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved. I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," Isaiah xlv. 22. xliii. 25.

(2.) Righteousness. By believing in him sinners are not only pardoned, but justified. They are accepted in the Beloved, and accounted righteous by his righteousness imputed to them, which we are assured is unto all, and upon all that believe, without any difference or exception, Rom. iii. 22. Hence his people adore him, and glory in him by his name, "The Lord our Righteousness." In him they possess a righteousness answerable to the demands of the holy law, have confidence and liberty of access to God at present, though conscious of

innumerable deficiences in themselves, and they shall stand with boldness before him in this righteousness, and not be ashamed in the great day of his appearance, when he shall come to judge the world.

(3.) Strength. The forgiveness of sin that is past would little avail, unless there was provision made for a continual supply of needful grace. Without this we shall quickly grow weary and yield to the force of surrounding temptations, till at length the latter end would be worse than the beginning. But now every sincere soul may be freed from this fear. The way of prevention is pointed out, and the success infallibly secured by that one promise, though there are many to the same effect, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength," Isaiah xl. 31.

(4.) Healing. This is often necessary; for the spiritual warfare is not to be maintained long without wounds. Our great enemy is so subtle, so watchful, so well provided with temptations adapted to every temper and circumstance; and we are so weak, unpractised, and so often remiss and off our guard, that he will at times prevail to bring us into a dark, barren, backsliding state, despoiled of comfort, and oppressed with fears, but see what a good and gracious Shepherd we have: hear his comfortable words: "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick," Ezek. xxxiv. 16.

(5.) Support under trouble. He has engaged to lead his people safely through fire and through water, Isaiah xliii. 2. He gives them leave to cast all their care upon him, with an assurance that he

careth for them, 1 Pet. v. 7. He has said, "All things shall work together for their good," Rom. viii. 28; that his grace shall be sufficient for them, 2 Cor. xii. 9; and that in good time he will bruise Satan under their feet, make them more than conquerors, Rom. xvi. 20. viii. 37; and place them out of the reach of sin and sorrow for ever. Besides the habitual peace which arises from the believing consideration of these truths, he has likewise peculiar seasons of refreshment, when he manifests himself to the soul in a way the world knows not of, and often makes the hour of their sharpest trials the time of their sweetest and highest consolations: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ," 2 Cor. i. 5.

3. All dispensations are under his direction. He is Lord of all, and does according to his pleasure among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth. He is the supreme Disposer,

(1.) Of those external dispensations which are distinguished by the name of providential.

[1.] Those that are welcome and prosperous are both His gifts and his purchase. To his people they come free; but he paid dear for them. And this gives them their chief value in the judgment of those who know him, to receive them as the pledges and fruits of his redeeming love. When the blessings of common providence are received and enjoyed as the gifts of God reconciled in Christ, they are then, and not otherwise, truly comfortable. It is this thought enables the poor believer often to taste a sweeter relish and flavour in bread and water, than the voluptuary ever knew in the wasteful profusion and studied refinements of luxury. To be able to look back and see how the hand of

our gracious Lord led us from our childhood, chose and managed better for us than we could have done, corrected our mistakes, and in many things exceeded our desires; to look round and see all our concerns in his sure keeping, who delights in our prosperity, and will suffer nothing to grieve us, but what he intends to employ as means for our greater advantage; to look forward and see, that he has prepared still better things for us than ever our eyes beheld, or our hearts conceived,—how cheering are these views! Those who are thus stayed upon the Lord Jesus, as over-ruling and managing all their concerns, are not terrified with every shaking leaf; "their hearts are fixed, trusting in the Lord."

[2.] Afflictive dispensations are likewise of his sending. And the consideration of his hand in them, the good he designs us by them, the assurance we have of being supported under them, and brought through them; according to the degree in which these things are apprehended by faith, and accompanied with a humbling sense of their own demerits, his people submit to his appointment with patience and thankfulness, and say, after the pattern which he has left them, The cup which my Saviour puts into my hand, shall I not drink it?

In brief, it is He who appointed the time and place of our birth, and all the successive connexions of our lives. Our civil and our religious liberties are both owing to his favour; and in these he has been peculiarly favourable to *us*. "He has not dealt so with every nation."

(2.) The dispensation of grace. It is He who raises up instruments to preach his gospel, appoints them their places, furnishes them with that measure

of gifts and sufficiency which he sees requisite and best. And it is he only that makes their poor labours successful. He sends his word to some, and brings others to his word: and in both cases, he so makes use of ordinary means, that to a common eye he seems to do nothing, when in reality he does *all*. He brought St. Paul to Corinth, and maintained him there a considerable time against all the efforts of his enemies, Acts xviii. 10. He over-ruled the thoughtless rambling of Onesimus, Philem. 11. and led him, by a way which he knew not, to the means by which he had appointed to bring him to the knowledge of himself. And these instances are recorded for our instruction, as specimens of what he does in the same kind every day.

(3.) The dispensation of death. Our times are in his hands. He claims it as his own prerogative, that he keeps the key of death and the invisible state, Rev. i. 18. None can remove us sooner, none can detain us a moment longer, than his call. In this likewise he is little observed. We charge death to fevers, frights, and falls; but these are only the messengers which he sends. Sin has brought us all under a sentence of death; but the moment and the manner of the execution befall us according to his good pleasure. Till then, though his providence leads us through fire and water, though we walk upon the brink of a thousand apparent, and a million of unseen dangers, we are in reality in perfect safety. Having appointed St. Paul to stand before Cesar, though the tempest greatly assaulted, and seemingly overpowered the ship he was in, St. Paul was as safe on the stormy sea, when all probable hope of being saved was taken away, Acts xxvii. 24. as Cesar himself upon his

throne. But when his time is come, in vain are all the assistance of friends, or the healing arts of medicines, to procure the smallest respite.

(4.) The dispensation of judgment. "The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son;" John v. 22. and has especially appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by the man Jesus Christ, whom he hath ordained, Acts xvii. 31. Then his glory shall be confessed by all. Every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him. Awful will the day be to those who hate him, when he shall appear in flaming fire, to convince sinners of all their ungodly deeds, which they have committed, and of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him, Jude 15. They must give an account of all. Account, did I say? they can give none; but will be struck dumb before him, and hear with horror their dreadful doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," Matt. xxv. 41.

But it will be a joyful time to his own people. The clouds of infirmity, affliction, and reproach, under which they are now obscured, shall vanish away, and they shall shine forth like the sun in the presence of their Father. God, even their own God, shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall be glorified, and their enemies ashamed. What joy will fill their hearts, when Jesus the Judge shall own his relation to them before assembled worlds, and shall say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" Then sorrow and sighing shall be heard no more; but songs of triumph and shouts of everlasting joy shall

take place; and so shall they be ever with the Lord.

How are your hearts affected with this subject? Do you not expect that I should close it with a suitable word of application?

1. To those who are as yet in their sins. Will you not tremble before this great Lord God? If these things are not so, if you can prove that we have followed cunningly devised fables, go on secure. But have I not your consciences on my side? Do you not feel a secret foreboding that these are the truths of God? And dare you still persist? Do you not see that you are already in his hands? In a moment he could break you in pieces, yet he spares. He affords you one opportunity more. To-day, while it is called to-day, hear his voice; lest to-morrow should surprise you into eternity, and the weight of unpardoned sins should sink you into the lowest hell. As he has power to punish, so likewise he is mighty to save. Believe his word, and live. His obedience unto death is a plea with which you may approach the mercy-seat. He has power to take away your heart of stone, to subdue your enmity, to forgive your sins; and what he does he does freely, without money, and without price. You need not, you cannot mend yourselves before you come to him. If you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you obstinately reject him, you will perish under the most aggravated guilt, as sinners against the light and grace of the gospel.

2. You that see your need of a Saviour, lift up your heads and rejoice. Is He not, thus qualified, able to save to the uttermost? Why should you keep back, when he bids you come unto him, that you may find rest? Could you invent any invita-

tions more free, more full than those that are recorded in the gospel? Can you desire any stronger security, than the blood of Jesus, and the oath of Him that liveth for ever? Do you wish to know how other great sinners have succeeded in their application to him? Search the scriptures, and read how he saved Mary Magdalen, the dying thief, the cruel jailer, the persecuting Saul, and many of those who were actually concerned in nailing him to the cross. Be patient, continue waiting on him in prayer, and you shall find he has not inclined you to seek his face in vain.

3. To believers I hope this is a comfortable theme. You see all your concerns are in safe hands. He to whom you have committed your souls, is able to keep them. Jesus, who has all authority and power in heaven and in earth, vouchsafes to be your Shepherd. What then can you want, for whom he engages to provide? What have you to fear who are under his protection? Why then do you so often distrust, so often complain? It is because your faith is weak. Are you tempted to think you could place yourselves to more advantage than he has placed you, that you could do better without the afflictions he is pleased to send you, that you cannot spare what he takes away, nor do well without something which he withholds? Reject all such thoughts; they are highly dishonourable to your Saviour, and to your profession. Those who know not God *must* reason thus; but you have a covenant promise, that all things are working together for your good. "This is not your rest, it is polluted." But you will soon be at home: and then, when by a clearer light you look back upon the way by which the Lord led you through the wilderness, you will

be ashamed (if shame is compatible with the heavenly state) of your misapprehensions while in this dark world, and will confess to his praise, that mercy and goodness surrounded you in every step, and that the Lord did all things well. What you will then see, it is now your duty and your privilege to believe. If you sincerely desire his guidance in all things, labour to submit to it. The path which he has marked out for you is difficult, but he has trod it before you, and it leads to glory. The time is short. Yet a little while, and you shall receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

SERMON VIII.

THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST.

MATTHEW XI. 27.

ALL THINGS ARE DELIVERED UNTO ME OF MY FATHER: AND NO MAN KNOWETH THE SON, BUT THE FATHER: NEITHER KNOWETH ANY MAN THE FATHER, SAVE THE SON, AND HE TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL HIM.

THE love we bear to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the confidence we place in him, will always be exactly proportioned to the apprehensions we form of him. Therefore to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of him," 2 Pet. iii. 18. are spoken of as inseparably connected. On this account the scriptures are frequent and full in describing him to us, that we may have a large acquaintance with his all-sufficiency, and be delivered from our sins and fears. An awakened conscience that sees the need of a Saviour, well knows that the person who can deservedly lay claim to its trust, must have these three properties, power, authority, and intention to save. How these eminently belong to Jesus, we learn from his own words here. Power belongeth to him, for he is a Divine Person, the Creator, Possessor, and Upholder of all things. Authority is his, for all things are delivered to him. Thus far we have proceeded, and are now to speak of his intention or office, the design of his appearance, and for which he is authorized. This is intimated in the close of my text. We are therefore now to speak,

III. Of his office, summarily included in this

one thing, To reveal the knowledge of God. "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

The knowledge of God here spoken of, intends something more than merely to know that there is a God. Some faint apprehensions of this all men have by nature. This great truth is so clearly manifested in the works of creation and providence, that any man would be greatly offended if he were supposed to be ignorant of it. But as it is one thing to know that there is a king over the nation, and quite another thing to *know the king*, so as to have liberty of access to him, and an interest in his favour; so is it in the case before us. Our Lord did not come to tell us that there is a God, (the devils know this, and tremble,) but to reveal to us such a knowledge of God as may stand with our comfort; to teach us how poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinners may draw near to God with hopes in his mercy, and call him their Father and their Friend.

Now, besides the revelation of this knowledge in the Old Testament, which may be properly ascribed to Christ, inasmuch as he was the Lord, Guide, and Teacher of his church from the beginning, and instructed Moses and the prophets in the things concerning himself,—I say, besides this, (which was made at sundry times and in divers manners, in a more dark and imperfect way,) our Lord Jesus, through his incarnation, has vouchsafed us a two-fold revelation of that knowledge of God in which standeth our eternal life.

1. In his Person
2. By his Spirit.

1. In his Person. In this respect he is said,

Heb. i. 3. to be, " The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." That God is great, and good, and wise, appears in part from his works; but it is only a small portion of these attributes we can spell out in this way; and there are other perfections in God, of which we can gain no certain knowledge, without a farther revelation. But would we see a glorious display of the great God, let us turn our eyes to Jesus, and behold him by faith in two principal views.

(1.) As hanging upon the cross. Could we have seen this awful transaction, and been in a right frame of mind, we should naturally have asked such questions as these, Who is he? What has he done? Had we been told, This Person, thus destitute and tormented, is the beloved Son of God, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; we must have farther asked, Why then was he scourged, wounded, and nailed to the tree? Why are those barbarous men permitted to mock his sufferings? Why does he not deliver himself, and destroy his enemies? The proper answer to these questions includes a revelation of the Divine perfections.

[1.] Wisdom. We had deserved to perish, but His mercy designed to save us with an everlasting salvation. Yet this must be in a way worthy of himself. Sin must be punished, and the honour of his broken law vindicated. How could this be done, and the righteousness of God made to harmonize with our peace? A wisdom astonishing to angels, is manifested in devising this wonderful means. No sacrifices, Heb. x. 4—7. or offerings, no acts of obedience or mediation, which creatures could supply, would have been of the least avail when the injured majesty of God demanded a satisfaction.

But the eternal Word, united to our nature, afforded a propitiation worthy of God, and suitable for us. Jesus, by his obedience unto death, has made an end of sin, Dan. ix. 24. and brought in an everlasting righteousness, available for all those who flee to him as the hope set before them, for refuge from approaching wrath.

[2.] Love. God so loved the world. If you ask *How?* judge from this instance; words cannot express it. He *so* loved sinners, enemies, rebels, that for their sakes he abandoned and delivered up his beloved Son into the hands of wicked men, permitted him to be assaulted by the powers of darkness; yea, it pleased the Father himself to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. This is love without parallel, and beyond conception. We can only admire, and say, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us," 1 John iii. 1. When Jesus Christ as crucified is clearly apprehended by faith, then we have the most convincing, the most affecting proof, that God is love.

[3.] Justice. Wonder not that God's own Son is thus treated. He stands in the place of sinners, and therefore he is not, he cannot be spared. The words his enemies use, Matt. xxvii. 42. to his reproach, will, in the lips of his redeemed people, be an expression of his highest praise. Having undertaken to save others, and being determined not to give up their cause, it is in that respect absolutely impossible for him to save himself.

Again, this justice, which was once as a flaming sword to forbid and exclude every hope of salvation to fallen man, is now engaged in our behalf. For since it has pleased the Father to charge sin upon

his own Son, his wrath will turn away from all who believe. The immense debt is already paid, and justice will not exact it twice. From henceforth God is not only gracious and merciful, but just and faithful in the forgiveness of sin, 1 John i. 9. and declares his own righteousness in justifying the believer in Jesus, Rom. iii. 26.

(2.) The knowledge of God is made known in the person of Christ, if we contemplate him as reigning in glory. He is no longer a man of sorrows, oppressed and despised. He is now upon the throne. In him the fulness of the Godhead dwells, and from him, as light from the sun, the unsearchable riches of his goodness are communicated to indigent, unworthy sinners. All the Divine perfections shine gloriously in him, as the God-Man, the Mediator, who is exalted above all conception and praise, and doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

[1.] Grace. The great God is pleased to manifest himself in Christ, as the God of grace. This grace is manifold, pardoning, converting, restoring, persevering grace, bestowed upon the miserable and worthless. Grace finds the sinner in a hopeless, helpless state, sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Grace pardons the guilt, cleanses the pollution, and subdues the power of sin. Grace sustains the bruised reed, binds up the broken heart, and cherishes the smoking flax into a flame. Grace restores the soul from wandering, revives it when fainting, heals it when wounded, upholds it when ready to fall, teaches it to fight, goes before it in the battle, and at last makes it more than conqueror over all opposition, and then bestows a crown of

everlasting life. But all this grace is established and displayed by covenant in the Man Christ Jesus, and without respect to him as living, dying, rising, reigning, and interceding in the behalf of sinners, would never have been known.

[2.] Power. The whole creation proclaims that power belongs unto God. But in nothing will his power be more illustriously displayed than in the wonders of redeeming love! What power is necessary to raise those who are spiritually dead in sin, to soften the heart of stone, to bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion! Wherever the gospel of Christ is faithfully preached, it is always confirmed by this accompanying power. How quickly, how easily did he change Saul from a persecutor to an apostle! Again, how is his power illustrated by the care he takes of all who believe in his name, affording to every one of them seasonable, suitable, and sufficient supplies in every time of need! so that his weak, helpless, and opposed people are supported, strengthened, and enabled, to hold on, and to hold out, against all the united efforts of the world, sin, and Satan.

[3.] Bounty. How glorious is Jesus in his kingdom! Exalted beyond all conception and praise; wearing upon his vesture, and upon his thigh, the name that is above every name; and having all thrones, principalities, and powers, obedient to his will, and adoring at his feet. But all his riches and honours (so far as their capacities can receive) he condescends to share with his people. He owns their worthless names, he permits them to claim the most tender relation to him, and to call him their Brother, their Friend, and their Husband. Yea, he says concerning them, "To him that over-

cometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne," Rev. iii. 21. To him, therefore, we must look for the most astonishing and affecting display of the Divine bounty.

Thus the knowledge of God is revealed in the person of Christ by the word. But great and important as these truths are, we cannot receive and understand them merely by reading. The Lord Jesus, therefore, has favoured his church with a further revelation. That is,

2. By his Spirit. This was one principal fruit of his ascension and intercession, Acts ii. 33. With the promise of his Spirit he cheered his disciples when sorrowing under the apprehension of his departure: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," John xvi. 7. The offices of the Holy Spirit are various as our wants; he teaches, comforts, sanctifies, and seals the children of God; but he effects all these benefits by revealing the knowledge of God, as manifested in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

(1.) In convincing sinners of their lost estate, which is absolutely necessary to their deliverance. None will prize the Saviour but those who feel their need of him. Two things are necessary to convince a man of his lost condition by nature and practice as a sinner—the spirituality of the law, and the sufferings of Christ: the one shows the universality of sin, the other its demerit. But these can only be truly discerned by the light of the Spirit of Christ. While St. Paul (who was never absolutely without the law) was ignorant of

the law's spirituality, "I was," says he, "alive," Rom. vii. 9. I had so little knowledge both of the law and of myself, that I trusted to it for righteousness, and vainly thought that I yielded it obedience, and grounded my hopes of salvation thereon. "But when the commandment came," when the Spirit explained and enforced it in its full extent, as reaching to the very thoughts of the heart, and requiring an obedience absolutely perfect, "then sin revived, and I died." All my hopes vanished, I saw every principle, affection, and action, polluted; and the corruptions which I supposed were tamed, broke forth with redoubled vigour. Again, though sin is declared to be displeasing to God, and destructive to man, by all the evils and miseries with which the world is filled, and all the punishments which the righteous Judge of all the earth has inflicted on the account of it; yet the just demerit of sin is not to be learnt by the destruction of Sodom, or of the old world, but only from the sufferings of Christ, who has born the curse for sinners. Nor is it sufficient to know historically that he did suffer, and how he suffered. Where these things are not known by the light of the Spirit, they are no more regarded than a worn-out tale. But where the Spirit of Christ reveals by the word, the nature, cause, and end of his sufferings, then sin appears exceedingly sinful. Nothing less than this can make the soul abhor it.

(2.) The Spirit produces faith in Jesus, as having once suffered, and now mighty to save. His blood, his righteousness, his intercession, compassion, and power, are presented to the soul in a light which bears down the objections of guilt, unbelief, and

Satan. Then the wounds made by sin are healed. Then old things pass away, all things become new, all difficulties are solved, and God is revealed experimentally to the soul, as holy, righteous, and true, in justifying the believer in Jesus.

(3.) Those whom the Spirit thus comforts, he also seals, Eph. i. 13. He impresses the image of Christ upon them. Such is the power of the views he gives them of his glory, that they are transformed into the resemblance of their Lord. 2 Cor. iii. 18. Though the first traces of this delineation are faint and indistinct in the sight of men, yet they are perfect *in kind*. The Spirit impresses feature for feature, and grace for grace, John i. 16. and the chief thing he designs and effects by all his subsequent dispensations while the soul remains in the body, is to heighten and finish the heavenly signature. Together with this, and in the same degree, he seals and ratifies to their consciences an interest in all the promises of the gospel; and by infusing into their hearts the temper of children, he gives them confidence at the throne of grace, enables them to cry, Abba, Father, and bears witness with their spirits that they are born of God. Thus God is revealed not only to them, but in them; and they are made conformable to him in whom they believe, in all righteousness, goodness, and truth.

Let me once more address,

1. Poor mourning souls. Are you seeking to Jesus? you have good reason; you see he is a mighty Saviour. He is furnished with full authority, and came expressly on purpose to save such as you. He assures you, that none shall sincerely seek him in vain. Believe his word, and dismiss

your fears. He has begun his good work, by revealing to you your misery, danger, and helplessness, by leading your thoughts to himself. He will not stop here; he will in due time accomplish his whole commission, by revealing to you that knowledge of God in which standeth your present peace and eternal life.

2. Careless sinners. How greatly will your guilt be aggravated if you receive this grace of God, the gospel of salvation, in vain! Do not your hearts tremble when you think of meeting the Lord Jesus in glory? Have you an answer ready, when he shall ask you why you refused his instruction, and cast his words behind you? The light of truth has visited you, how long will you resist it? How long will Satan blind your eyes? To those who accept not his revelation of grace, he will be ere long revealed in flaming fire. O humble yourselves before him, while the hope of mercy is yet afforded; and pray for the Spirit we have been speaking of, that you may be recovered out of the snare of the devil, and made partakers of the knowledge and image of God.

3. Believers. This subject is the food of your souls. You remember when you had dark, hard, and uncomfortable thoughts of God; but you have seen his glory in the person of Christ, you have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. ii. 12. that you may know the things that are freely given you of God. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, Eph. v. 8. Walk then as children of the light; remember your calling, your privileges, your obligations, your engagements. Let these all animate you to press forward, to endure the cross, to despise the shame.

Let it not grieve you to suffer with Christ here, for hereafter you shall reign with him. The hour is swiftly approaching, when you shall be out of the reach of changes and sorrow for ever. Then "thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended," Isaiah lx. 20.

SERMON IX.

LABOURING AND HEAVY LADEN SINNERS DESCRIBED.

MATTHEW XI. 28.

COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR, AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

We read that when David was withdrawn into the wilderness from the rage of Saul, every one that was in distress, or in debt, or discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became their captain, 1 Sam. xxii. 2. This was a small honour in the judgment of Saul and his court, to be the head of a company of fugitives. Those who judge by outward appearances, and are governed by the maxims of worldly wisdom, cannot have much more honourable thoughts of the present state of Christ's mystical kingdom and subjects upon earth. The case of David was looked upon as desperate by those who, like Nabal, 1 Sam. xxv. 10. lived at their ease. They did not know, or would not believe the promise of God, that he should be king over Israel: and therefore they preferred the favour of Saul, whom God had rejected. In like manner, though our Lord Jesus Christ was a Divine Person, invested with all authority, grace, and blessing, and declared the purpose of God concerning himself, and all who should obey his voice, that he would be their King, and they should be his happy people; yet the most that heard him saw no excellence in him, or need of him; their portion and their hearts were in this

world, therefore they rejected him, and treated him as a blasphemer and a madman. A few, however, there were who felt their misery, and desired to venture upon his word. To these he gave the freest invitation. Those who accepted it found his promise made good, and rejoiced in his light. Thus it is still; he is no longer upon earth to call us; but he has left these gracious words for an encouragement to all who need a Saviour. The greatest part of mankind, even in christian countries, are too happy or too busy to regard him. They think they deserve some commendation, if they do not openly mock his messengers, disdain his message, and offer abuse to all who would press them to-day, while it is called to-day, to hear his voice. Even this treatment his servants must expect from many. But there are a few, like David's men, 1 Sam. xxii. 2. distressed in conscience, deeply in debt to the law of God, and discontented with the bondage of sin, who see and believe that He, and He only, is able to save them. To these labouring and heavy-laden souls, he still says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." May his gracious Spirit put life and power into his own words, and into what he shall enable me to speak from them, that they may at this time receive a blessing and peace from his hands.

The text readily points out three inquiries.

I. Who are the persons here invited?

II. What is it to come to Christ?

III. What is implied in the promised rest?

I. The persons are those who labour (the Greek expresses toil with weariness*) and are heavy laden.

* Compare Luke v. 5. John iv. 6. where the original word is the same.

This must, however, be limited to spiritual concerns, otherwise it will take in all mankind, even the most hardened and obstinate opposers of Christ and the gospel. For let your consciences speak, you that account the yoke of Christ a heavy burden, and judge his people to be miserable and melancholy, are not you wearied and burdened in your own way? Surely you are often tired of your drudgery. Though you are so wedded and sold to your hard master, that you cannot break loose; though you are so mad as to be fond of your chains; yet you know, and I know, (for I remember the gall and wormwood of that state,) that you do not find all that pleasure in your wickedness which you pretend to. So much as you affect to despise hypocrisy, you are great hypocrites yourselves. You often laugh when you are not pleased, you roar out your boisterous mirth sometimes, when you are almost ready to roar with anguish and disquiet of spirit. You court the friendship of those whom in your heart you despise; and though you would be thought to pay no regard at all to the word of God, there are seasons when (like him you serve) you believe and tremble. And, further, what visible burdens do you bring upon yourselves! "The way of transgressors is hard," Prov. xiii. 15. Your follies multiply your troubles every day. Confusion and uneasiness in your families, waste of substance, loss of health and reputation, discord, strife, sorrow and shame; these are the bitter fruits of your evil ways, which prey on your present hours, and make your future prospects darker every day. Surely you are weary and heavy laden beyond expression.

But this is not the case with others. You avoid

gross vices, you have perhaps a form of godliness. The worst, you think, that can be said of you is, that you employ all your thoughts, and every means that will not bring you under the lash of the law, to heap up money, to join house to house, and field to field; or you spend your days in a thoughtless indolence, walk in the way of your own hearts, and look no farther: and here you will say you find pleasure, and insist on it, that you are neither weary nor heavy laden. I might enlarge on your many disappointments, the vain fears which are inseparable from those who live without God in the world, and the trouble we find from disorderly, restless, and unsatisfied passions. But, to wave these things, I say briefly, that if you are not labouring and heavy laden, then it is plain that you are not the persons whom Christ here invites to partake of his rest. And though you can rest without him now, think, O think, what rest you will find without him hereafter! If you now say, Depart, he will then say, Depart. And who will smile upon you when he frowns? To whom will you then flee for help? or where will you leave your glory? O that it would please him to touch your hearts, that, as weary and heavy laden sinners, you might fall humbly at his feet, before his wrath burn like fire, and there be none to quench it!

But to proceed: Let us,

1. Explain the terms, what it is to *labour* and be *heavy laden.*

2. Show who are the persons that answer this description.

First, the persons are said to be,

1. Labouring, toiling, weary. This is not hard to be understood. Weariness proceeds either from

labour or from weakness; and when these are united, when a person has much to do, or to bear, and but little strength, he will soon be weary. The case of some, however, is, that when they are tired, they can lay down their burden, or leave off their work. But these are not only labouring, fainting, weary, but,

(2.) Heavy laden likewise. As if a man had a burden which he was unable to bear a single minute, so fastened upon him, that he could not by any means be freed from it; but it must always press him down, night and day, abroad or at home, sleeping (if sleep in such a circumstance was possible) and waking. How would the poor creature be wearied! How could you comfort or give him ease, unless you could rid him of his burden? How desirable would the prospect of liberty be to such a one! and how great his obligations and acknowledgments to his deliverer!

2. This representation is an emblem of the distresses and burdens of those who seek to Jesus, that they may have rest in their souls: nor can any truly seek him till they feel themselves in such a state. They may be generally comprised under three classes.

(1.) *Awakened sinners.* None but those who have felt it can conceive how sinners labour, toil, and faint, under their first convictions. They are burdened.

[1.] With the guilt of sin. This is a heavy load. When Jesus bore it, it made him sweat great drops of blood. It is true, he bore the weight of all his people's sins; but the weight of one sin is sufficient to press us down, if God permits it to lie heavy upon us. I suppose the best of us can remember

some action or incident or other in our past lives which we would wish to forget if we could. Now, how would you be distressed to have a person sounding in your ears, from morning till night, and every day of your lives, that worst thing that ever you did! Would it not weary you? This is a faint image of the convinced sinner's state. When conscience is truly awakened, it acts this officious and troublesome part; but its remonstrances are not confined to one sin, it renews the remembrance and the aggravations of multitudes. Nor is this the voice of a man, but indeed of God, who speaks in and by the conscience. The poor sinner hears and trembles: then the complaint of Job is understood: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth," Job xiii. 26. Do you wonder that such a one can no longer take pleasure in worldly things? It is impossible, unless you could silence this importunate voice, that they can bear themselves at all. Nay, often it is so strong and urgent, gives them such a lively sense of what sin is, and what it deserves from a righteous God, that they are almost afraid or ashamed to see any person that knows them. They are ready to think, that people can read in their faces what passes in their hearts, and almost expect that the ground should open under their feet. O how wearisome is it to be continually bowed down with such a burden as this!

[2.] With the power of sin. Perhaps they were once in some measure at ease in this respect; they saw others whom they supposed to be worse: and therefore trusted in themselves that they were righteous. But convictions rouse and inflame our sinful natures. St. Paul exemplifies this by his own case

before conversion: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died," Rom. vii. 9. He never was strictly without the law, for he expected salvation by obeying it; but he was without the knowledge of its spirituality, demands, and sanction: and while he remained thus, he was alive, that is, his hope remained good, and he was satisfied with his obedience. But when the commandment came, when its extent, purity, and penalty were brought home to his conscience, sin revived, and he died. He found all his pretensions to liberty, obedience and comfort, were experimentally confuted by what he felt in himself. The more an awakened sinner strives against his corruptions, the more they seem to increase. This wearies him; for, besides the greatness of the toil itself, he finds himself weak, weak as water, weaker and weaker. And he is not only weary, but heavy laden, for this likewise is a burden which he cannot shake off. He sees that he cannot succeed; yet he dares not desist.

(2.) *Those who are seeking salvation by the works* of the law, are labouring and heavy laden, engaged in what is beyond their strength, and baffles all their endeavours. This may appear from what has been already said. It is a hard task to keep the whole law; and nothing else will either please God, if made the ground of justification, or satisfy the conscience that has any true light. Those declarations of the word, that "Cursed is the man who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. and "Whoso keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all," James ii. 10. keep them in continual anxiety and servitude. The wickedness

of their flesh makes it impossible for the law to give a ground of hope; yet they cannot lay down their burden, but are compelled to renew the fruitless task. I speak not of mere formalists, who go through a round of external services, without meaning or design; but all who are in a measure sincere, find themselves still followed with a restless inquiry, "What lack I yet?" Matt. xix. 20. Endless are the shifts and contrivances they are put to; but all in vain: for, what makes it worse, they always add to this burden many inventions of their own, as though the demands of the law were too few.

(3.) *Those who are under temptation.* It is a hard and wearisome service to be in close conflict with the powers of darkness. The leading branches of this exercise are,

[1.] When the soul is assaulted, and as it were filled with insufferable blasphemies. When Satan is permitted to shoot these fiery darts, none can express (not even those who have felt them) the amazement and confusion that fills the mind. For a person who has received a reverence for the name and attributes of God, to be haunted from morning to night, from day to day, with horrid imprecations, so strongly impressed, that he often starts and trembles with an apprehension, that he has certainly consented, and spoken them aloud with his lips; this is irksome and terrifying beyond description.

[2.] When the foundations of faith and experience are attacked. Many who have thought themselves grounded in the truth, who have hoped that they had surely tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have in their first comforts been ready to say, "I shall never be moved; thou, Lord, of thy goodness hast made my mountain so strong," Psa. xxx. 6, 7

have found themselves afterwards at their wit's end, when the enemy has been permitted to come in upon them like a flood, Isa. lix. 19. One black cloud of temptation has blotted out all their comfortable evidences; and they have been left to question, not only the justness of their own hopes, but even the first and most important principles on which their hopes were built.

[3.] When the hidden corruptions and abominations of the heart are stirred up. And perhaps there is no other way but this of coming to the knowledge of what our depraved natures are capable. Such things a season of temptation has discovered to some, which I believe no rack nor tortures could constrain them to disclose, though but to their dearest friend. This subject, therefore, will not bear a particular illustration. The Lord's people are not all acquainted with these depths of Satan. As people who live on shore have a variety of trials, dangers and deliverances, yet know but little of the peculiar exercises of those who go down to the sea in ships; so, in the present case, there are great waters, Psa. cvii. 24. depths of temptation, known comparatively to few. Those who are brought through them, have more to say of the wonders of God in the great deep than others; and this is his design in permitting it, that they may know more of him, and more of themselves. But while they are under these trials, they are weary and heavy laden; and this burden they must bear till the Lord removes it. The help of men, books, and ordinances, is sought and tendered in vain, till his appointed hour of deliverance draws near.

These, therefore, convinced, striving, and tempted souls, are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Come

to me, and I will give you rest." The purport of this gracious invitation we are to consider hereafter. In the mean time rejoice in this, Jesus has foreseen your cases, and provided accordingly. He says, *Come;* that is, *believe*, as he himself expounds it: "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst," John vi. 35. See how his promises suit the state you are in.

1. Are you heavy laden with guilt? The gospel-message is, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," 1 John i. 7.

2. Are you groaning under the power of indwelling sin? Hear his gracious words: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," John xi. 25. And to the same purpose his prophet: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength," Isa. xl. 29.

3. Are you striving in the fire to keep the law? "Wherefore will you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Forego the vain attempt. Is it not written, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth?" Rom. x. 4.

4. Are you in temptation? He that says, "Come unto me," has been tempted himself, Heb. ii. 18. and knows how to pity you. He has power over your enemy, and can deliver you with a word, Mark i. 27. Did he not thus dispossess Satan in the days of his humiliation? and if *then*, surely he is no less able *now;* for since that time he has gloriously triumphed over the powers of darkness,

Col. ii. 15. And as his arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy; he has said, without exception, "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. and thousands who have been in your distress, have successively found that promise fulfilled: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," Rom. xvi. 20. Zech. iii. 2.

SERMON X.

OF COMING TO CHRIST.

MATTHEW XI. 28.

COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR, AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

The dispensation of the gospel may be compared to the cities of refuge in Israel. It was a privilege, an honour to the nation in general, that they had such sanctuaries of Divine appointment; but the real value of them was known to few. Those only who found themselves in that case for which they were provided could rightly prize them. In like manner, the gospel of Christ is the highest privilege and honour of which a professing nation can boast; but it can be truly esteemed and understood by none but weary and heavy laden souls, who have felt their misery by nature, are tired of the drudgery of sin, and have seen the curse of the broken law pursuing them, like the avenger of blood of old. This is the only consideration which keeps them from despair, that God has provided a remedy by the gospel; and Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." If they could receive the full comfort of these words, and heartily obey the call, their complaints would be at an end; but remaining ignorance, unbelief, and Satan, combine in various ways to keep them back. Some will say, "O that I could come! but, alas! I cannot." Others, "I fear I do not come aright."—Having,

therefore, endeavoured to show you the persons chiefly intended here under the character of those who labour and are heavy laden, I proceed to consider,

II. What it is to come to Christ. I have observed in general, that it appears to have the same signification with believing in him. But that we may understand it the more clearly, let us inquire,

1. How those to whom he personally spoke these words, in all probability, understood them?

2. How far their apprehensions of them are applicable and suitable to our circumstances?

3. Whether, as we have the same necessity, we have not likewise equal encouragement to come to Christ with those who were conversant with him upon earth?

1. It does not appear, that those to whom our Lord spoke in person, were so much perplexed as many are now, to know what *coming* or *believing* should mean; he seems to have been understood both by friends and enemies. Many questioned his authority and right to exact a dependence on himself; but they seemed to be at no difficulty about his meaning. It certainly implied more than a mere bodily coming into his presence. He was surrounded, and even followed by multitudes, who never came to him in the sense of his invitation. To such, while standing about him, he complained, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life," John v. 40. Therefore, if we consult what is written of those who came to Jesus for relief, and obtained it, we may conclude, that coming to him implies,

(1.) A persuasion of his power, and of their own need of his help. They knew that they wanted

relief, and conceived of him as an extraordinary person, empowered and able to succour them. This persuasion of Christ's sufficiency and willingness was then, as it is now, afforded in different degrees. The centurion spoke with full assurance; "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," Matt. viii. 8. The leper more dubiously: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Matt. viii. 2. Another, in still fainter language: "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion, and help us," Mark ix. 22. The faith of this last was, as the man himself acknowledged, mixed with much unbelief and fear; yet Jesus did not despise the day of small things; he pardoned his suspicions, confirmed his fluctuating mind, granted him his request; and his case is recorded as an instance how graciously he accepts and cherishes the feeblest effects of true faith: "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

(2.) An actual application. This evidenced their faith to be right. They did not sit content with having heard of him, but improved it: they went to him, told him their cases, and implored his compassion. Their faith prevailed against all discouragements. In vain the multitude charged them to hold their peace, Mark x. 48. knowing that he only was able to relieve them, they cried so much the more a great deal. Even when he seemed to discover a great reserve, Matt. xv. 27. they still waited, and knew not how to depart without an answer. Nor could a sense of unworthiness, fear, or shame, keep them back, Mark v. 27. when once they had a strong persuasion of his power to save.

(3.) When he was sought to as a soul-physician, as was the case with many whose bodily diseases he

healed, and with others who were not sick, those who came to him continued with him, and became his followers. They depended on him for salvation, received him as their Lord and Master, professed an obedience to his precepts, accepted a share in his reproach, and renounced every thing that was inconsistent with his will, Luke ix. 23. 60. Some had a more express and open call to this, as Matthew, who was sitting at the receipt of custom, regardless of Jesus, till he passed by him, and said, "Follow me," Matt. ix. 9. That word, accompanied with the power of His love, won his heart, and diverted him from worldly pursuits in an instant. Others were more secretly drawn by his Spirit and providence, as Nathanael, John i. 46. and the weeping penitent who silently washed his feet with her tears, Luke vii. 38. and this was the design and effect of many of their bodily and family afflictions. The man who was brought to be healed of the palsy, received the forgiveness of his sins, Mark ii. 5. and the ruler, who first came to Jesus with no other view than to obtain the life of his son, John iv. 53. obtained much more than he asked or expected. The Lord afforded such an affecting sense of his power and goodness upon this occasion, that he from henceforth believed, with all his house.

2. These things are applicable to us. Jesus is no longer visible upon earth; but he has promised his spiritual presence to abide with his word, ordinances, and people, to the end of time. Weary and heavy laden souls have now no need to take a long journey to seek him; for he is always near them, and in a spiritual manner, where his gospel is preached. Poor and inconsiderable as we are in

the judgment of the world, I trust we have a right to claim his promise, Matt. xviii. 20 and to believe that he is even now in the midst of us. Therefore come unto him; that is,

(1.) Raise your hearts, and breathe forth your complaints to him. Do you see your need of him? Be persuaded, and pray to him to assure you more strongly of his power and goodness. He is just such a Saviour as your circumstances require, as you yourself could wish for; and he is able to convince you in a moment that he is so. If he is pleased to cause a ray of his glory to break in upon your mind, your fears, and doubts, and griefs, would instantly give place.

(2.) Persevere in this application to him. Set a high value upon his public ordinances, and be constant in attending them. His eye is fixed upon us; his arm is revealed amongst us. I trust it is a time of his grace, and that every day we meet, he does something for one or another in the assembly. He has a fixed time for every one whom he relieves. He knew how long the poor man had waited at the pool side, John v. 6. and when his hour came, he spake and relieved him. So do you endeavour to be found in his way; and not here only, but in whatever he has made your duty. Read his word; be frequent in secret prayer. You will find many things arising from within and without to discourage and weary you in this course; but persist in it, and in good time you shall find rest for your souls. These are the means which the Lord has appointed you. Converse likewise at proper opportunities with his people; perhaps he may unexpectedly join you, as he did the two disciples when walking to Emmaus, Luke xxiv. 32.

and cause your hearts to burn within you.—Further.

(3.) You are to follow him, to take up his cross, to make a profession of his name and gospel, to bear contentedly a share in the reproach and scorn which is the usual lot of those who will live godly in Christ Jesus, in the midst of an unbelieving and perverse generation. You are not only to trust in him as a Priest to atone for your sins, but to receive and obey him as your Teacher and your Lord. If you are truly weary and heavy laden, you will be glad to do this, and are crying to him to enable you: and you are likewise willing to forsake every thing that is inconsistent with his will and service. If you are desirous to come to Christ, it is not grievous to you to think of parting with your sinful pleasures and vain companions. Rather these are a part of the burden from which you long to be freed.

Come in this way, and you shall find rest for your souls. Are any of you thinking,—O that I could!—Surely if I had seen him and heard him, I should have ventured. But now unbelief and fear keep me back. I observe, therefore,

3. That as we have no less need of Jesus than those of old who saw and conversed with him; so we have at least equal encouragement to come unto him. This, I think, will appear, if we consider that,

On the one hand, the bodily presence of Christ, considered in itself, had no peculiar or extraordinary influence upon those who saw him, but all was wrought by the power of his Spirit; the same Spirit which is promised to abide with his church for ever.

(1.) Multitudes who saw and heard him were unmoved and unconvinced by all the wonders of his love. Though he spoke as never man spoke, and went about doing good, he was slighted, opposed, and hated even to the death. And those who know the heart of man, and believe that the carnal mind is enmity against God, will allow it to be highly probable, that upon a supposition he should appear again in the same circumstances of humiliation, and to use the same authoritative freedom in vindicating the commands of God from the vain figments, traditions, and customs of men, he would meet with little better treatment, even in those countries which are called by his name, than he did from the proud, self-righteous, unbelieving Jews. We may warrantably suppose there were many more lepers, blind, &c. in the places where he resorted, than those who came to him to be healed.

(2.) Many of his professed disciples, even after they had followed him for a while, turned back and forsook him, John vi. 66. We have therefore the less reason to wonder when we see any give up the profession of the gospel, and return to the world again. It was thus from the beginning; and those who do so now, would have done so if they had lived then. His looks, his voice, his gesture, and even his discourses and miracles, could not engage a single person to cleave to him with full purpose of heart, unless he was likewise spiritually revealed to the eye of their faith, as the image of the invisible God, the brightness of the Father's glory, full of grace and truth.

(3.) Even his true disciples who were constantly with him, to whom he had personally made the

most express and endearing promises, and who sometimes thought themselves assured beyond the power of a doubt, yet could not maintain their confidence longer than his Spirit upheld them. To them expressly, though not to them exclusively, Jesus had said, "I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again to receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also," John xiv. 3. When he had concluded that affectionate discourse, their doubts and fears were dissipated, and they could confidently say, "Now we believe," yet it was not long before they found his reply fulfilled. Jesus said unto them, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, when you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone," John xvi. 30—32. Will not this instance convince you of your mistake, when you think you could depend more on a voice from heaven, than on the written word? The apostles had the strongest ground of assurance imaginable, the word of the Lord Jesus himself, face to face; and yet this would not support them, without renewed supplies of strength.

On the other hand, consider if the loss of his bodily presence is not more than made up to us.

[1.] By the fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit than was afforded before his ascension. The Holy Ghost was not then given in so clear and abundant a measure as afterwards, because Jesus was not yet glorified, John vii. 39. While he was with them, he was their Comforter and Teacher; but he told them, "When I depart, I will send you another Comforter," John xiv. 16. and xvi. 7. whose office and abode with you will be in many respects so much more advantageous, that on

this account it is expedient for you that I go away.

[2.] By the greater number and variety of promises which we enjoy. We have not only the scriptures of the Old Testament in common with them, but to us the ancient revelations of the will and love of God are enlarged, explained, applied, and confirmed by the superaddition of the new. Eph. iii. 5.

[3.] By the experience of multitudes of all ages, people, and languages, who have gone before us, since their time, the cloud of witnesses to the truth and grace of God, the reality of eternal things, and the victorious power of faith, is now increased by the concurrent evidence of thousands and millions, who have overcome all opposition by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony.

[4.] By the proofs and living witnesses of his power and grace amongst ourselves. Are there not many with whom you worship and converse from day to day, who can tell you, they were even dead in trespasses and sins, but Christ has quickened them? They were once as you are, labouring and heavy laden: they waited for him long, had a share in such temptations and conflicts as you now feel, were often at a stand, and upon the point of concluding their case to be desperate, as you may think yours at present; but at length they were enabled to come unto him, and they have found rest. Every such instance should encourage you to gird up the loins of your minds; to be patient, and hope to the end. As they have known your troubles, so shall you partake of their consolations

in due time. What then should hinder you from coming to Jesus, that you may find rest? What exceptions can your unbelief devise against the invitations, motives, and examples, which the Lord sets before you by his preached gospel?

Is it a sense of your load which makes you say you are not able? But consider that this is not a *work*, but a *rest*. Would a man plead, I am so heavy laden, that I cannot consent to part with my burden; so weary, that I am not able either to stand still or lie down, but must force myself farther? The greatness of your burden, so far from being an objection, is the very reason why you should instantly come to Christ, for he alone is able to release you.

But perhaps you think you do not come aright. I ask, how would you come? If you can come as a helpless unworthy sinner, without strength, without righteousness, without any hope but what arises from the worth, work, and word of Christ, this is to come aright. There is no other way of being accepted. Would you refresh and strengthen yourself, wash away your own sins, free yourself from your burden, and then come to him to do these things for you? May the Lord help you to see the folly and unreasonableness of your unbelief!

I have observed already, that coming to Christ signified more at first than merely to come into his presence: so likewise it means more now than to be found among his worshippers. Let none of you be deceived with a form of godliness. Examine your religious profession by this test. Have you laboured under a sense of your misery? Have you known the burden of sin? Has Jesus given you

rest? Or, are you earnestly seeking to him for it? If you understand not the meaning of these questions, you are not yet in that state to which the promises are made. And why are you not labouring and heavy laden? Are you not sinners? Has not the righteous God revealed a law? Has he not guarded this law with the sanction of a dreadful curse? Have you not transgressed this holy law in thought, word, and deed, times without number? If you have not, why do you join in the public confession, and call for mercy when the commandments are repeated? If you have, how will you escape the penalty? How indeed, if you dare to neglect this great salvation? The law condemns you already; if you receive not the gospel, you must perish without remedy: for other name or means whereby men can be saved there is none under heaven. Once more you are warned of danger; once more the refuge is set before you. We preach Jesus, who came to seek and to save those who were lost; Jesus who was wounded with whips, and thorns, and nails, that his enemies might be healed. Does not this thought affect you? Will you slight his love, despise his blood, and crucify him afresh? God forbid. Is there not some heart now relenting, beginning to feel impressions of fear, shame, and grief? Happy beginning! Obey the voice of God now opening in your conscience! Now is the time to pray; before you knew not what to pray for: but now you see you want the blood of Christ, and the teaching of his Spirit. "Ask, and you shall receive; and seek, and you shall find." Take your warrant from my text; Jesus has said,

"Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Let your hearts answer, "Take away our iniquity, and receive us graciously: Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God; and in thee, the fatherless, the helpless, the comfortless, find mercy."

SERMON XI.

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE REST OF BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.

MATTHEW XI. 28.

COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

THE learned have a variety of arguments whereby to prove the scripture to be the word of God. But though that kind of proof, which may be brought in a way of reasoning and external evidence, is doubtless useful upon proper occasions; yet I apprehend the chief and most satisfactory argument to those who are capable of receiving it, arises from the correspondence between the subject-matter of the scripture and the state of an awakened mind. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, we begin to see every thing around us to be just so as the scripture has described them. Then, and not till then, we perceive, that what we read in the bible concerning the horrid evil of sin, the vileness of our fallen nature, the darkness and ignorance of those who know not God, our own emptiness, and the impossibility of finding relief and comfort from creatures, is exactly true. We cannot but apply the words of the woman, John iv. 29. and say, Come and see a book that has told me all that ever I did, the ground of all my complaints, the true cause and nature of all the evil I either see, hear, or feel, from day to day. And as we find

our disease precisely described, so we perceive a suitableness in the proposed remedy, we need a Saviour, and he must be a mighty one; but though our wants and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous, we are convinced that the character of Christ is sufficient to answer them all. We need a rest, a rest which the world cannot give. Inquire where we may among the creatures, experience brings in the same answer from all, "It is not in me." This again confirms the word of God, which has forewarned us that we shall meet nothing but disappointment in such pursuits. But there is a spiritual rest spoken of which we know to be the very thing we want, and all our remaining solicitude is how to attain it. From hence, as I said, we may assuredly conclude, that the book which gives us such just views of every thing that passes, must be given by inspiration from him who is the Searcher of hearts. This proof is equally plain and conclusive to all capacities that are spiritually enlightened, and such only are able to understand it. We are now to speak,

III. Of this promised rest. And here two things offer to our consideration.

1. What this rest is.

2. How it is obtained.

1. The Greek word *αναπαυσω* expresses something more than rest, or a mere relaxation from toil; it denotes refreshment likewise. A person weary with long bearing a heavy burden, will need not only to have it removed, but likewise he wants food and refreshment, to restore his spirits, and to repair his wasted strength. Such is the rest of the gospel. It not only puts a period to our fruitless labour, but it affords a sweet reviving cordial.

There is not only peace, but joy in believing. Taken at large, we may consider it as twofold.

(1.) A present rest. So the apostle speaks, "We who have believed do enter into rest," Heb. iv. 3.

[1.] The common wearisome pursuit of the world is described as "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not," Isa. lv. 2. wandering from object to object in quest of good, Psa. iv. 6. but still mortified by incessant and repeated disappointment. We should pity a person whom we should see seeking some necessary thing day after day, which we knew was impossible to be obtained: it is, however, the case with all till they come to Christ. Satisfaction is what they profess to aim at, and they turn every stone, (as we say,) try every expedient to meet with it, but in vain. It is only to be found in him. When they come to him, their wishes are answered. This is exemplified by our Lord in the character of a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, Matt. xiii. 46. who was still upon the inquiry till he had found one pearl of great price. This answered and exceeded his desires: upon the discovery of this one, he rejoiced to forego all his former acquisitions, and to give up every other possession on purpose that he might obtain it.

[2.] I have spoken something concerning the wearisome exercise of a conscience burdened with guilt; but by coming to Jesus, and believing in him, an end is put to this. When we are enabled to view our sins as laid upon Christ, that those who come are accepted in the Beloved, that there is no more condemnation, but pardon, reconcilia

tion, and adoption are the sure privileges of all who trust in him, O the sweet calm that immediately takes place in the soul! It is something more than deliverance. There is a pleasure more than answerable to the former pain, a comfort greater than all the trouble that went before it. Yea, the remembrance of the former bitterness greatly enhances the present pleasure. And the soul understands and experiences the meaning of those scriptures: "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing," Psa. cxxvi. 1, 2. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation," Isa. xii. 1, 2.

[3.] There is likewise a rest from the power of sin. In vain is this sought from resolutions and endeavours in our own strength. Even after we are spiritually disposed, and begin to understand the gospel-salvation, it is usually for a season rather a *fight* than a *rest*. But when we are brought nearer to Christ, and taught to live upon him as our sanctification, deriving all our strength and motives from him by faith, we obtain a comparative rest in this respect also. We find hard things become easy, and mountains sink into plains, by his power displayed in our behalf. Farther,

[4.] There is a rest from our own works. The believer is quite delivered from the law as a covenant, and owes it no longer service in that view.

His obedience is gracious, cheerful, the effect of love; and therefore he is freed from those fears and burdens which once disturbed him in the way of duty. At first there was a secret, though unallowed dependence on himself. When his frames were lively he was strong, and thought he had something to trust to, but under a change (and changes will happen) he was at his wit's end. But there is a *promised*, and therefore an *attainable* rest in this respect; a liberty and power to repose on the finished work and unchangeable word of Christ; to follow him steadily through light and darkness; to glory in him *only* when our frames are brightest; and to trust in him *assuredly* when we are at our lowest ebb.

Such is the *present rest;* in different degrees according to the proportion of faith, and capable of increase, even in those who have attained most, so long as we remain in this imperfect state. But there is,

(2.) A future rest, besides and beyond all that can be experienced here: "There remaineth yet a rest for the people of God," Heb. iv. 9. Faint and imperfect are our most enlarged ideas of that glory which shall be revealed. "It does not yet appear what we shall be," 1 John iii. 2. Who can describe or conceive the happiness of heaven? The most we can clearly understand of it lies in negatives. It will be as unlike as possible to this wilderness of sin and sorrow where we are now confined. Here we are in a warfare, but then we shall enter into perfect rest.

[1.] A rest from all sin. There no unclean thing shall defile or disturb us for ever. We shall

be free from sin in ourselves. This alone would be worth dying for. Indwelling sin is a burden under which even the redeemed of the Lord must groan, whilst they sojourn in the body; and those who are most spiritual, are most deeply affected with shame, humiliation, and grief, on this account, because they have the clearest views of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the love of Christ, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts. Therefore the apostle Paul, though perhaps in grace and talents, in zeal and usefulness, distinguished above all the children of Adam, accounted himself the chief of sinners, 1 Tim. i. 15. less than the least of all saints, Eph. iii. 8. and cried out, under the disparity he felt between what he was and what he would be, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. vii. 24. But we shall not carry this burden beyond the grave. The hour of dissolution shall free us from the inbred enemies (the inseparable concomitants of this frail perishing nature) which now trouble us, and we shall see them no more for ever.

Again, we shall be free from the all displeasing effects of sin in others. Our hearts shall be no more pained, nor our ears wounded, nor our eyes filled with tears, by those evils which fill the earth. Now, like Lot in Sodom, we are grieved every day with the filthy conversation of the wicked, 2 Pet. ii. 7. Who that has any love to the Lord Jesus, any spark of true holiness, any sense of the worth of souls in his heart, can see what passes amongst us without trembling? How openly, daringly, almost universally, are the commandments of God

broken, his gospel despised, his patience abused, and his power defied. To be a silent spectator of these things is sufficiently grievous; but if (as we are in duty bound) we dare to stand as witnesses for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, we find the spirit of the first-born, Cain, instantly takes fire, and denounces war against all who should presume to say, that we ought to obey and fear God rather than men. Invectives and ill treatment are the certain lot of all who openly and consistently appear on the Lord's side; and if they escape stripes and bonds, imprisonment and death, it is to be ascribed to the restraints of Divine Providence, and (as a means in our happy land) to the temper of the laws, and to the clemency of the powers under whom we live. These things often constrain the believer to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest, Psa. lv. 6. Let us not be weary or faint in our minds; ere long this wish shall be answered. A glorious rest awaits you, where sin and sinners shall have no place, nor the alarms of war be any more heard.

[2.] A rest from all outward afflictions, which, though necessary, and, under the influence of Divine grace, profitable, are grievous to bear; but then they will be necessary no more. Where there is no sin, there shall be no sorrow. Then, believers, God "shall wipe away all tears from your eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away," Rev. xxi. 4.

[3.] A rest from Satan's temptations. How busy

is this adversary of God and man! What various arts, what surprising force, what constant assiduity, does he employ to ensnare, distress, and terrify those who by grace have escaped from his servitude! He says, like Pharaoh of old, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will destroy," Exod. xv. 9. He follows them to the last stage of life, but he can follow them no farther. The moment of their departure out of the body, shall place them beyond his reach for ever.

[4.] A rest from unsatisfied desires. Here the more we drink, the more we thirst: but there our highest wishes shall be crowned and exceeded; we shall rest in full communion with Him whom we love; we shall no more complain of interruptions and imperfections, of an absent God, and a careless heart. Here, when we obtain a little glimpse of his presence, when he brings us into his banqueting-house, and spreads his banner of love over us, how gladly would we remain in such a desirable frame! how unwilling are we to come out of the mount! But these pleasing seasons are quickly ended, and often give place to some sudden unexpected trial, which robs us of all that sweetness in which we lately rejoiced. But when we ascend the holy hill of God above, we shall come down no more; we shall be for ever with the Lord, never offend him, never be separated from him again. We shall likewise rest in full conformity to him, Psa. xvii. 15. Here we find a mixture of evil in our best moments; when we approach nearest to him we have the quickest sense of our defilement, and how much we fall short in every branch of duty, in every temper of our hearts!

but when we shall see Jesus as he is, we shall be fully transformed into his image, and be perfectly like him.

2. But how is this rest to be obtained? Blessed be God, in that way which alone can render it attainable by such unworthy indigent creatures. If it were to be bought, we have nothing to offer for it; if it were proposed as a reward of merit, we can do nothing to deserve it. But Jesus has said, I will *give* you rest. Our title to it cost him dear; he purchased it for us with his own blood; but to us it comes freely. Faith in his name puts us in immediate possession of the first-fruits, the earnest of this inheritance; and faith will lead us powerfully and safely through all hinderances and enemies to the full enjoyment of the whole. Faith unites us to Christ; gives us an immediate interest in all the benefits of his life, death, and intercession; opens the way of communication for all needful supplies of grace here, and insures to us the accomplishment of all the Lord has spoken to us of, in a state of glory. "He that believeth shall be saved," Mark xvi. 16. saved in defiance of all the opposition of earth and hell; saved, notwithstanding he is in himself unstable as water, weak as a bruised reed, and helpless as infancy. What Jesus will give, none can take away. Only remember that it is a free gift. Receive it thankfully, and rejoice in the Giver. Let him have all the glory of his own undertaking. Renounce every hope and every plea, but his promise and mediation. Commit your souls to him, and then fear nothing. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms," Deut. xxxiii. 27. He

will fight your battles, heal your wounds, refresh your fainting spirits, guide you by his counsel while here, and at last receive you to himself.

May we not therefore say, Happy are the people that are in such a case! happy they, who have been enabled to accept this gracious invitation, who have already entered upon the rest of grace, and have a well-grounded expectation that they shall rest in glory! Believers, what should you fear, or why complain? Look back to where the Lord found you sleeping in, helpless and hopeless, yet insensible of your danger: look forward to what he has provided for you, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; a crown of life, a kingdom that cannot be shaken: think of the love, the suffering, the glory of him to whom you owe these blessings; and let these considerations animate you to run with patience and thankfulness the race that is set before you, Heb. xii. 1.

Happy likewise are you whose hearts are fixed upon this rest, and this Saviour, though as yet you are in heaviness, through manifold temptations. The Lord will give you rest. Doubt it not, he cannot deny himself: wait his hour; though he seem to tarry long, yet maintain your confidence in his promise. Redouble your prayers, cry mightily to him, he will not (as perhaps many around you do) rebuke your importunity, and charge you to hold your peace. Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear, and was forsaken? or whom did he ever despise that called upon him?

And you who are yet strangers to rest, are thus far happy, that you are still spared, and have the gospel continued to you. The Lord is still waiting to be gracious; he says to all, Come unto me, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Do you not see this rest desirable? What rest, either here or hereafter, can you expect, if you remain in the service of sin? Why may not you obtain your liberty? You are no worse than others, either by nature or practice. Though you have been transgressors from the womb, you are not excluded if you do not exclude yourselves: though your sinful habits and inclinations are exceedingly strong, he is able to subdue them. There is a power in his blood, and in that Spirit which he is exalted to bestow, sufficient to make the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots, Jer. xiii. 23. to soften the hardest heart, and to pardon the most aggravated guilt, and to enable those to do good who have been accustomed to do evil. Arise, he calleth you. O may he accompany the outward call of his word with the efficacious power of his grace, that you may this instant obey his voice, and flee to him for refuge! Whither can you flee else? Who but Jesus can save you from the wrath to come? Be wise, and delay no longer. "But if you will not hear, my soul shall weep for you in secret places," Jer. xiii. 17. If you will not come to Jesus for life, you must die. If you are out of Christ, God is angry with you every day. The curse of his broken law lies heavy upon you, whether you are asleep or awake, abroad, or at home, at the market or in the church. The wrath of God is revealed against you; if you turn not, he

will whet his sword, Psa. vii. 12. he hath bent his bow, and made it ready: he hath prepared the instruments of death to smite you; he hath ordained the arrows of his vengeance against you: And can you, dare you, go on in your sins, and say, I shall have peace? O may you be wise in time! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31. "Consider this, ye that forget him, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver," Psa. l. 22.

SERMON XII.

OF THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW XI. 29.

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF ME: FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART: AND YE SHALL FIND REST TO YOUR SOULS.

Those who are enabled to come unto Christ, not only experience a change of state, but of character, disposition, and practice. They are not only freed from condemnation, but they are made partakers of a Divine nature. They are delivered from the slavery and yoke of Satan, and made willing in the day of the Lord's power, to accept and embrace his yoke, which is commended to us in the following verse, as easy and pleasant. Our Lord speaks of his service as a yoke or burden, because it is so esteemed by all who know him not. They account him a hard master, and think his service wearisome; but those who have made the experiment, find it otherwise: though it must be confessed it exposes to some difficulties, calls for the daily exercise of self-denial, and will not admit either of competition or composition with the world, nor can be pleasing to the unrenewed part of our nature. But the knowledge of his love, the hope of glory, and those seasonable refreshments with which he is pleased to favour those who come unto him, sweeten every bitter thing, and make them willing to bear

his yoke, and to prefer it to all that the world accounts freedom.

Let us inquire,

I. What is meant by the yoke of Christ.

II. The proper means by which we are enabled to take it upon us; that is, the believing consideration of him as our effectual Teacher, and perfect pattern.

III. The happy effect of bearing his yoke—We shall find rest to our souls.

I. The yoke of Christ, taken at large, includes all the dependence, obedience, and submission, which we owe him, as our rightful Lord, and gracious Redeemer. He has a double right to us; "he made us," Psa. c. 3. We are the creatures of his power: he gave us our being, with all our capacities and enjoyments. And farther, "he bought us," Acts xx. 28. he pitied us in our low and fallen state, and gave his own life, his precious blood to ransom us from that ruin and misery which was the just desert of our sins. There is good reason, therefore, that we should be his, and live and cleave to him in love alone; that we should no longer live to ourselves but to Him who died for us and rose again. In particular, we may consider,

1. The yoke of his profession. This is very pleasing to a gracious soul, so far as faith is in exercise. Far from being ashamed of the gospel of Christ, he is ready and willing to tell to all who will hear, what God has done for his soul. Many young converts, in the first warmth of their affection, have more need of a bridle than of a spur in this concern. For want of prudence to time things rightly, and perhaps for want of more tenderness mixed with their zeal, they are apt to increase their

own troubles, and sometimes, by pushing things too far, to obstruct the success of their well-meant endeavours to convince others. But though this is a fault, it is a fault on the right side, which time, experience, and observation will correct. And though we are hasty enough to condemn the irregular overflowings of a heart deeply impressed with a sense of eternal things, I doubt not but the Lord, who owns and approves the main principle from whence they spring, beholds them with a far more favourable eye, than he does the cold, cautious, temporizing conduct of some others who value themselves upon their prudence. We should judge thus, if we had servants of our own. If we had one who was heartily and affectionately devoted to our interests, always ready to run by night or by day, refusing no danger or difficulty from a desire to please us, though sometimes, through ignorance or inattention, he should make a mistake, we should prefer him to another of greater knowledge and abilities, who was always slow and backward, and discovered at least as much care to save himself from inconveniences, as to promote our service. However, this warm zeal usually suffers abatement; we are flesh as well as spirit; and there are some circumstances attending a profession of the gospel, on the account of which it may be with propriety termed a yoke to us, who have so many remaining evils within us, and so many outward temptations to call them forth. It will certainly stir up opposition from the world, and may probably break in upon our dearest connexions, and threaten our most necessary temporal interests, 2 Tim. iii. 12. Matt. x. 36.

2. The yoke of his precepts. These the gracious

soul approves and delights in; but still we are renewed but in part. And when the commands of Christ stand in direct opposition to the will of man, or call upon us to sacrifice a right hand or a right eye, though the Lord will surely make those who depend upon him victorious at the last, yet it will cost them a struggle; so that when they are sensible how much they owe to his power working in them, and enabling them to overcome, they will at the same time have a lively conviction of their own weakness. Abraham believed in God and delighted to obey; yet when he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, this was no easy trial of his sincerity and obedience; and all who are partakers of his faith are exposed to meet, sooner or later, with some call of duty, little less contrary to the dictates of flesh and blood.

3. The yoke of his dispensations. This none can bear as they ought, but those who come to him. It is natural for us to repine, to fret and toss like a wild bull in a net, Isa. li. 20. when we are under afflictions. Believers likewise find their flesh weak, when their spirits are willing; yet they see sufficient reasons for submission, and they know where to apply for grace. Affliction is a touchstone that discovers what spirit a man is of. The hypocrite may keep up a fair semblance of true piety, while all things go smooth and to his wish; but in sharp troubles the mask will drop off. Satan proceeded upon this maxim in his contest with Job; and the maxim is a truth, though Satan was mistaken in the application.

II. The appointed means by which sinners are enabled to bear the threefold yoke, is suggested in the words "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly."

However amiable and desirable the disposition I have described may appear, you will never acquire it by strength, wisdom, or diligence of your own. Our Lord, to prevent you wearying yourselves with unsuccessful efforts and needless disappointments, has assured you beforehand, "Without me you can do nothing," John xv. 5. But here he graciously offers you the assistance you need. As if he had said, I know you are unable of yourselves, but I will help you. Be not afraid of the prospect, but consider what I *can* do. To my power all things are easy; I can make the crooked straight, and the rough smooth; I can sweetly engage your affections, subdue your wills; influence your practice, and deliver you from your sinful fears. Consider likewise what I *have* done; thousands who by nature were as unskilful and impatient as yourselves, have been made willing in the day of my power.

Therefore, "Learn of me." Be not afraid to come to me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. Great and mighty as I am, you may freely apply to me in every doubt and difficulty. Awakened souls, through a sense of guilt, and the power of unbelief, are backward and unwilling to come to Christ. They think, Surely he will take no notice of such a one as I am. But observe how kind and condescending is his invitation; how graciously suited to engage our confidence! It was said of a Roman emperor, that those who durst speak to him were ignorant of his greatness, but those who durst not were still more ignorant of his goodness. This was a false and impious compliment when applied to a sinful mortal; but it is justly applicable to Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. His glorious

majesty may well fill our hearts with awe, and humble us into the dust before him: but his immense compassions, tenderness, and love are revealed, to overbalance our fears, to give us confidence to draw nigh to him, and an encouraging hope that he will draw nigh to us.

Again, "Learn of me." I know the cause why these things appear so hard. It is owing to the pride and impatience of your hearts. To remedy this, take *me* for your example; I require nothing of you but what I have performed before you, and on your account. In the path I mark out for you, you may perceive my own footsteps all the way. This is a powerful argument, a sweet recommendation of the yoke of Christ, to those who love him, that he bore it himself. He is not like the pharisees, whom he censured on this very account, Matt. xxiii. 4. who bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.

1. Are you terrified with the difficulties attending your profession, disheartened by hard usage, or too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Learn of Jesus, imitate and admire his constancy: "Consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," Heb. xii. 3. *αναλογισασθε*. Make a comparison (so the word imports) between yourself and him, between the contradiction which he endured, and that which you are called to struggle with, then surely you will be ashamed to complain. Admire and imitate his meekness; when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; he wept for his enemies, and prayed for his murderers.

Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

2. Do you find it hard to walk stedfastly in his precepts, especially in some particular instances, when the maxims of worldly prudence, and the pleadings of flesh and blood, are strongly against you? Learn of Jesus. He pleased not himself, Rom. xv. 3. he considered not what was safe and easy, but what was the will of his heavenly Father. Entreat him to strengthen you with strength in your soul, that as you bear the name of his disciple, you may resemble him in every part of your conduct, and shine as lights in a dark and selfish world, to the glory of his grace

3. Are you tempted to repine at the dispensations of Divine Providence? Take Jesus for your pattern. Did *he* say, when the unspeakable sufferings he was to endure for sinners were just coming upon him, "The cup which my Father has put into my hands, shall I not drink it?" John xviii. 11. and shall *we* presume to have a will of our own? Especially when we further reflect, that as his sufferings were wholly on our account, so all our sufferings are by his appointment, and all designed by him to promote our best, that is, our spiritual and eternal welfare?

It is thus by looking to Jesus that the believer is enlightened and strengthened, and grows in grace and sanctification, according to that passage of St. Paul, "We all with open face," or unvailed face, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. The word of God is a glass in which the goodness and beauty of the Lord Jesus are manifested to the eye

of faith by the light of the Holy Spirit. In this wonderful glass the whole object is not seen at once, but every view we take strengthens the sight to discover something not perceived before. And the prospect is not only affecting, but transforming; by beholding we are gradually formed into the resemblance of Him whom we see, admire, and love.

All those whom Jesus thus teaches to bear his yoke, find his promise fulfilled; they obtain,

III. Rest to their souls. Those who are truly awakened want nothing to make them happy, but to be assured that they have an interest in the Redeemer's love. Now, this satisfaction is peculiar to those who take his yoke upon them, and are daily learning of him, and copying after him.

For, 1. This affords the best and most unshaken evidence, that he has begun a good work of grace in our hearts: I say the best, *because* the most unshaken. Many are greatly perplexed to know if they are truly converted; and are kept the longer in suspense, because they overlook the ordinary scriptural method of confirmation. They expect to know it by some extraordinary sensation suddenly impressed upon their minds. But besides that there have been many instances in which this expected evidence has been counterfeited, and a groundless confidence has been placed in a delusion or vain imagination, (to the hurt of many, if not to their overthrow,) even when they are from the gracious Spirit of God, they are for the most part transient; and when a different frame takes place, the believer is often tempted to question the reality of what went before. I think, therefore, the testimony of an enlightened conscience, judging by the word of God, and deciding in our favour, that by his grace

we have been enabled to take up the yoke of Christ, is in some respects a more satisfactory evidence that we are his, and that he is ours, than if an angel were sent from heaven to tell us, that our names are written in the book of life.

2. The promise of the peculiar manifestation of his love, is made and restricted to those who walk in the path of obedience, John xiv. 21. If the discoveries the Lord is pleased sometimes to make of himself to the soul, are not the proper and direct evidences of a state of grace, they are, however, exceedingly desirable. Whoever has tasted the sweets of that water of life, cannot but long for repeated draughts. When he lifts up the light of his countenance upon the soul, then is love, joy, and peace within, however dark and distressing things may be without. But this desirable presence can only be expected, while we wear His yoke, and walk in his steps. If we turn aside into forbidden paths, if we decline or dishonour the profession of his truth, we grieve the Holy Spirit, on whose communications our comforts are suspended; we give the enemies of our souls encouragement to assault us, and are in danger of falling from one wickedness to another, without the power of withstanding either the greatest or the smallest temptation, till the Lord is pleased to turn again to our assistance. In such a situation there can be no rest. "But he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely," Prov. x. 9. and findeth rest.

And true rest is no otherwise to be obtained. Those of you who refuse the yoke of Christ, well know in yourselves that you are far from rest. Your experience agrees with this declaration in the prophet: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the

wicked," Isa. lvii. 21. In what respect will you dare to pretend that you have the advantage of those who bear the yoke of Christ?

We allow that the profession of the gospel is subject to inconveniences; but surely not so many as those meet with who are ashamed, or afraid, or averse to maintain it. If those who are of your household are not your foes on this account, yet we can see how it fares with those who live without the fear of God. How many, and how sharp, are your trials from disobedient children, unfaithful servants, false friendships, ungoverned passions, and unsatisfied desires! Nor do you save any thing in point of character, not even with those by whom you are most desirous to be esteemed. They cannot indeed reproach you with being a believer; but may they not, do they not reproach and despise you for being a drunkard, or a liar, or a miser, or an extortioner? And is this more honourable than to suffer shame for the cause of Christ?

Do the precepts of Christ seem hard? Certainly not so hard as that miserable bondage you are under to Satan, the god of this world, who works in you, and rules over you, at his will. He will not allow you to listen to the united remonstrances of conscience, health, interest, and reputation. But you are hurried on in his drudgery, constrained, like a mill-horse, to toil in the same tedious round of folly and sin; though you are aware of the consequences and wages beforehand. How absurd is it for you to boast of your freedom, while you are compelled to rush into present misery, and to dare your eternal ruin, with your eyes open!

And how greatly are you to be pitied under the many unavoidable afflictions of life, to which you

are equally liable with the servants of Christ! When your idols are torn from you, when sickness seizes you, or death stares you in the face, then how do you fret and pine! how many are your fears and alarms! Then you are your own tormentors. The review of the past affords you only shame and regret. If you look forward to the future, you are filled with foreboding fears and distressing apprehensions; you are weary of living, and afraid to die.

Why then will you continue thus, when Jesus says, "Come unto me, that you may have rest?" O may he incline your hearts this day to hear his voice! Have you been hardened in your evil ways, by a suspicion that your case is desperate, that it is now too late, and that he whom you have so often rejected will refuse you mercy? Beware of such a thought: "There is forgiveness with him," Psa. cxxx. 4. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." He is gracious to pardon, and mighty to save; only acknowledge your offences, and throw down the arms of your rebellion. He is mighty to save, and no less willing than able. As yet there is hope; but who can tell how long his patience may bear with you? Take notice of that awful denunciation! "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1. If you seek him to day with all your hearts, you shall find him. But who can answer for to-morrow? To-morrow, or to night, your souls may be required of you; or if your lives are spared, you may be given up to judicial and incurable hardness of heart. If his Spirit should cease from striving with you, you are lost for ever.

SERMON XIII.

THE SERVICE OF CHRIST EASY AND PLEASANT TO HIS PEOPLE.

MATTHEW XI. 30.

FOR MY YOKE IS EASY, AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.

THIS verse alone, if seriously attended to, might convince multitudes, that though they bear the name of christians, and are found among the Lord's worshipping people, they are as yet entire strangers to the religion of the gospel. Can it be supposed, that our Lord would give a false character of his yoke? If not, how can any dream that they are his followers, while they account a life of communion with God, and entire devotedness to his service, to be dull and burdensome? Those, however, who have made the happy trial, find it to be such a burden as wings are to a bird. Far from complaining of it, they are convinced, that there is no real pleasure attainable in any other way.

What the yoke of Christ is, we have already considered. It includes the profession of his gospel, obedience to his precepts, and submission to his *will* under every dispensation. But since it is confessed, that a sinful nature and a sinful world will bring many difficulties, trials, and temptations, upon all who walk in this way, it may be worth our while to inquire more particularly, what there is in the yoke of Christ that overpowers all these hardships, and makes such amends for every suffering, that, upon the whole, every believer will subscribe to this as

a sure and experienced truth, that the "yoke is easy, and the burden light."

I. Those who bear the yoke of Christ, act from a principle which makes all things easy. This is love. It is said of Jacob, that when he served a hard master seven years for Rachel, they seemed to him but a few days, for the love which he bare her, Gen. xxix. 20. And many of you find it easy to do much for your parents, children, and friends, because you love them. But there is no love like that which a redeemed sinner bears to Him who "has loved him, and washed him from his sins in his own blood." Further, love produces the greatest effects when it is mutual. We are willing to do and suffer much to gain the affection of a person we regard, though we are not sure of success; but when the affection is reciprocal, it adds strength to every motive. Now, the believer does not love at uncertainties: he knows that Jesus loved him first, loved him when he was in a state of enmity, 1 John iv. 19. and that nothing but the manifestation and power of this love could have taught his hard unfeeling heart to love him whom he never saw, 1 Pet. i. 8. This love, therefore, affords two sweet and powerful encouragements in service.

1. A cordial desire to please. Love does what it can, and is only sorry that it can do no more. We seldom think much, as I have hinted already, either of time, pains, or expense, when the heart is warmly engaged. The men of the world, who understand not this heart-felt spring of true religion, think it strange that the believer will not run into the same excess of riot with them, 1 Pet. iv. 4. They wonder what pleasure he can find in secret prayer, in reading and hearing the word of God; they pity the

poor man who has such a melancholy turn, and gravely advise him not to carry things too far. But the believer can give them a short answer in the apostle's words: "The love of Christ constrains me," 2 Cor. v. 14. His ruling passion is the same with theirs, which makes his pursuit no less uniform and abiding; but the objects are as different as light from darkness. They love the perishing pleasures of sin, the mammon of unrighteousness, and the praise of men; but he loves Jesus.

2. A pleasing assurance of acceptance. If we know not whether what we do will be favourably received or not, it makes us remiss and indifferent. But this animates the Lord's people; they are assured that he will not overlook the smallest services or sufferings they are engaged in for his sake. He has told them in his word, that if they give but a cup of cold water in his name, and on his account, he will accept and acknowledge it, as if it were done immediately to himself, Mark ix. 41.

II. It makes a service still more easy and pleasant, if besides acting from a principle of love, the service itself is agreeable to our inclination. Esau would probably have done any thing to please his father, in hopes of obtaining the blessing; but no command could please him more than to be sent for venison, because he was a cunning hunter, and his pleasure lay in that way, Gen. xxv. 27. and xxvii. 3. Now, the believer has received a new nature; so that the Lord's commandments are not grievous to him, but he delights in them with his whole heart. It is true, he groans under remaining corruptions, and this is properly his burden, not the service of Christ, which he approves and de-

lights in, but because he can serve him no better. So far as faith is in exercise, he rejoices in every part of the yoke of Christ. He glories in the profession of his name. He has made Moses' choice; he prefers even the reproach of Christ to all the honours of the world, Heb. xi. 26; and has a measure of that spirit, by which the apostles were enabled to rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, Acts v. 41. He heartily consents to the precepts; he esteems them as a light to his feet; he makes them his meditation all the day. Nothing pleases him more than to find an increasing victory over the hinderances to his obedience; and the time of his greatest grief is, when, through infirmity, or the prevalence of temptation, he is seduced to neglect or transgress them, though in the smallest instance, and in what does not pass under human observation. Even afflictions, though not joyous in themselves, but grievous, are cheerfully submitted to, because the Lord has appointed them, and is pleased to account them a filling up of his sufferings, Col. i. 24.

III. In other cases, even when there is a principle of love, and the service not disagreeable in itself, yet weakness may render it wearisome or impracticable. Though perhaps you would willingly take a long journey to serve a friend; yet if you are sick or lame, what could you do? But the yoke of Christ is light and easy in this respect, that there is a sufficiency of strength provided for the performance. This consideration makes every difficulty vanish; for though these should be increased tenfold, yet if strength be increased in an equal proportion, it amounts to the same thing. What is hard or impossible to a child, is easy to a man;

what is hard to flesh and blood, is easy to faith and grace. The believer, though weak in himself, is strong in the Lord. The power on which he depends is not in his own keeping; but it is treasured up in the *covenant* of grace, or in the Lord Jesus, in whom all fulness dwells, and is always to be obtained by prayer. Every child of God is interested in the blessing of Asher: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy day is, so shall thy strength be," Deut. xxxiii. 25. By the *day* may be understood,

1. A day of service. Whatever the Lord appoints for us to do, if we depend upon him in the use of appointed means, he will certainly qualify, furnish, and strengthen us for the accomplishment of it. If David is called out to meet Goliath, though he is but a stripling, and the other a practised warrior from his youth, he shall not be disheartened or overcome, but be made a conqueror, though all appearances are against him, 1 Sam. xvii. 37. If we are in the path of duty, and if our help and hope is in the name of the Lord, we may confidently expect that he will uphold us, however faint and enfeebled we may seem to be to ourselves or others.

2. A day of suffering. If, like Daniel and his companions, we should be threatened with lions and flames, we may confidently commit our way to God; he can control the fire, and stop the lions' mouths, Dan. iii. 16. and vi. 22. Psa. xci. 13. 2 Tim. iv. 17. While all things are in his hands, whose we are, and whom we serve, why should we fear that they will act beyond the bounds of his permission, or that he will permit them to do any thing which it is not his purpose to overrule to his advantage? Such considerations in the hour of

need, seasonably impressed by his good Spirit, together with a trust in his promises, inspire us with new strength to meet the greatest danger undismayed; and with regard to trials immediately from his own gracious hand, he will so adjust them, in number, season, weight, and measure, to the ability he communicates, that we both shall be able to bear, and also find a way made for our escape. With such assurances, we may boldly say, "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man (or Satan) can do unto me."

IV. There is further, a consideration of profit and advantage, which makes the yoke of Christ easy. The believing soul is not mercenary. He loves his Master and his service; yet it is impossible to serve God for naught. In the keeping of his commandments, there is a reward, though not of debt, yet of grace, Psa. xix. 11. A great and sure reward, respecting both the life that now is, and that which is to come.

Those who sincerely take up the yoke of Christ, and cleave to him in love alone, have ample compensation in the present life for all that their profession can cost them. They enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, which is compared to a continual feast. St. Paul, though a champion for free grace, and determined to glory only in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, expresses a high and just value for this privilege, 2 Cor. i. 12. and that it afforded comfort, yea joy, in a time of trouble. Superadded to this, they are often favoured with the peculiar consolations of the Holy Spirit, which, though slightly esteemed by those who know them not, satisfy the soul as with marrow and fatness, and can change the voice of mourning into

songs of praise in an instant, Psa. lxiii. 3. And though these are not their constant food, yet they have real and habitual communion with God, from day to day, in his ordinances and providences. They live in his presence; they converse with him, and he with them; their good things are doubly pleasing, because they receive them from his hand: and this thought likewise sweetens every bitter cup of affliction which he prepares for their good. The mutual intercourse and communion his people have with each other, is likewise a considerable branch of their present reward. How pleasing is it, when speaking to each other in his name, they take sweet counsel together, they are confirmed in his way, by finding how their experiences answer as face to face in a glass! and he causes their hearts to burn within them, while they are freely declaring what he has done for their souls. Lastly, They are happy in a comfortable expectation of a better world, Gen. xlix. 18. and when the appointed time comes, death will put an end to all their troubles; and then shall they fully know and possess the future reward which the Lord has prepared and reserved for them that love him.

This is briefly summed up by the apostle: They shall be absent from the body, 2 Cor. v. 8. and all its inseparable evils; sin and sorrow, want, pain, and every distress that belongs to this mortal state shall affect them no more; and they shall be present with the Lord, whom they love. Then they shall see his face without a cloud, and share his joy without abatement or interruption; and all this shall be for ever. When they are made pillars of the New Jerusalem, they shall come out no more, Rev. iii. 12. 1 Thess. iv. 17. The prospect of this

makes them rejoice under all their tribulations; for they know whereto they lead, and how they will end. These light and momentary afflictions are working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17.

From these things I hope it will appear that the yoke of Christ is easy. His people serve him because they love him; they love his ways: he is their strength; he comforts them now, and will be their portion for ever.

But perhaps some, whom I would willingly comfort, will rather be discouraged by this representation, and say, Alas! if it is thus, I am yet to seek. My love is so faint, my strength so feeble, my consolations so small, my obedience so imperfect, that I am afraid I have not known the easy yoke of Christ. There are therefore some other things to be taken into the account, and which are no just exception to the character our Lord here gives of his yoke.

1. The entrance, or first application of the mind to the yoke, or profession of the gospel, is seldom pleasant. Though the work of grace leads to love, it usually begins in fear. On this point we have already spoken at large. It is no pleasing state to be weary and heavy-laden, to see ourselves obnoxious to a curse, and unable to escape; yet by apprehensions of this kind the soul is prepared to embrace the yoke of Christ; and none but those who have experienced the misery of a fallen state, will be truly desirous of the gospel rest.

2. The progress is gradual. The first dawnings of grace in the heart are faint, and hardly perceptible; hence the whole process is compared to things that are very inconsiderable in their first principles. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain

of mustard seed, which is hid and lost in the earth for a season; it is like leaven, which when cast into meal may be concealed and unnoticed for a while, but by degrees diffuses its influence through the whole mass, Matt. xiii. 31, 33. It is like the corn, which springs up and comes forward night and day, a man knows not how, Mark iv. 27. The growth in the christian life being thus slow and indistinct, many who aim to ascertain their interest rather by the degree than the reality of grace, are often dejected to find their attainments proceed no faster. It is indeed a humbling consideration, but ought not to rob us of the comfort arising from a believing view of what Jesus has completely wrought out for us, and of what he has promised he will infallibly perform in us, in his own good time. A deliverance from this poring into ourselves for the grounds of our hope, is a part, a considerable part, of the rest to which he invites us.

3. The difficulties attendant on that course of faith and obedience, which is included in taking his yoke upon us, are many and great. While we sojourn in a wilderness state, and in a sinful nature, there will be fightings without, and fears within. It is the appointed and necessary rule of our profession, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God," Acts xiv. 22. All who are against him will be against us for his sake, and the evil heart of unbelief will show itself in a variety of forms, as it is acted upon by various impressions, from the things of sense and the powers of darkness. But these troubles do not arise from the spiritual yoke of Christ, but from our present situation and circumstances, and shall therefore shortly cease for ever. His ways are ways of pleasantness, though we are sure to meet with perplexity

and uneasiness, so far, and so often, as we wander from them into our own crooked paths. But,

4. The end is sure. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved," Matt. x. 22; and all who are in his way, have Christ's promise and power engaged in their behalf, that they shall certainly endure, that he will so lead, guide, support, and strengthen them, that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate them from his love, Rom. viii. 38. Your complaints and fears, therefore, are no proof that you are not right. Go on in his name. Trust in him in whom you have believed, and be nothing terrified by your adversaries. The longer you wear the yoke, the easier you will find it.

Let each one examine himself by what has been offered. If you have not a principle of true love to Christ, and a prevailing desire to live in all holy obedience to his will, you are no christian; and though you may begin warmly, you will not be able to hold out, but your profession will wither away for want of root and moisture. Nor is it difficult to know whether you love him or not; if you do, you have seen your need of him, and abhor yourself in dust and ashes.

From hence likewise you may discern the difference between the religion of the gospel, and the formal worship that many are contented with, in which the heart has no place. Remember that "God is a Spirit," John iv. 24. and unless you love him, you cannot possibly please him. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned. His commandments likewise are spiritual; they extend beyond the surface of the outward conduct, and take cognizance even of the retired thoughts and intents

of the heart. Many sins may be avoided, and many duties performed, from motives and principles which, not being derived from his word, or conformable to it, are therefore sinful in themselves, and make every thing proceeding from them defective and displeasing in his sight. If you are attempting to serve him by your own natural strength and understanding, be assured that you have not yet taken up the yoke of Christ: if you had, you would find it answerable to the character he has given of it, for his word is truth. But your constrained obedience, you know in yourselves, far from being easy and light, is a heavy burden which you would be glad to cast off if you durst. You serve the Lord as a slave serves a hard master, not with a willing mind, but of necessity, and from a dread of punishment. But in vain do you draw near to him with your lips, while your heart is far from him. Therefore spend no longer your labour for that which is not bread, but come to Jesus, that you may find rest for your souls. He is able to take away your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh, to put a new spirit in you that shall delight in his yoke, to give you strength and ability for every part of your duty, and to make you a willing people in the day of his power.

Believers, rejoice in your security. The Lord has given you a never-dying principle of love, and provided for you a never-failing supply of grace. These will bear you up through all your journey, and at last bring you safely home to the mansions provided for you in your Father's house. Then shall you praise him, world without end.

THE END.

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